

saiREADER06

TURBULENCE

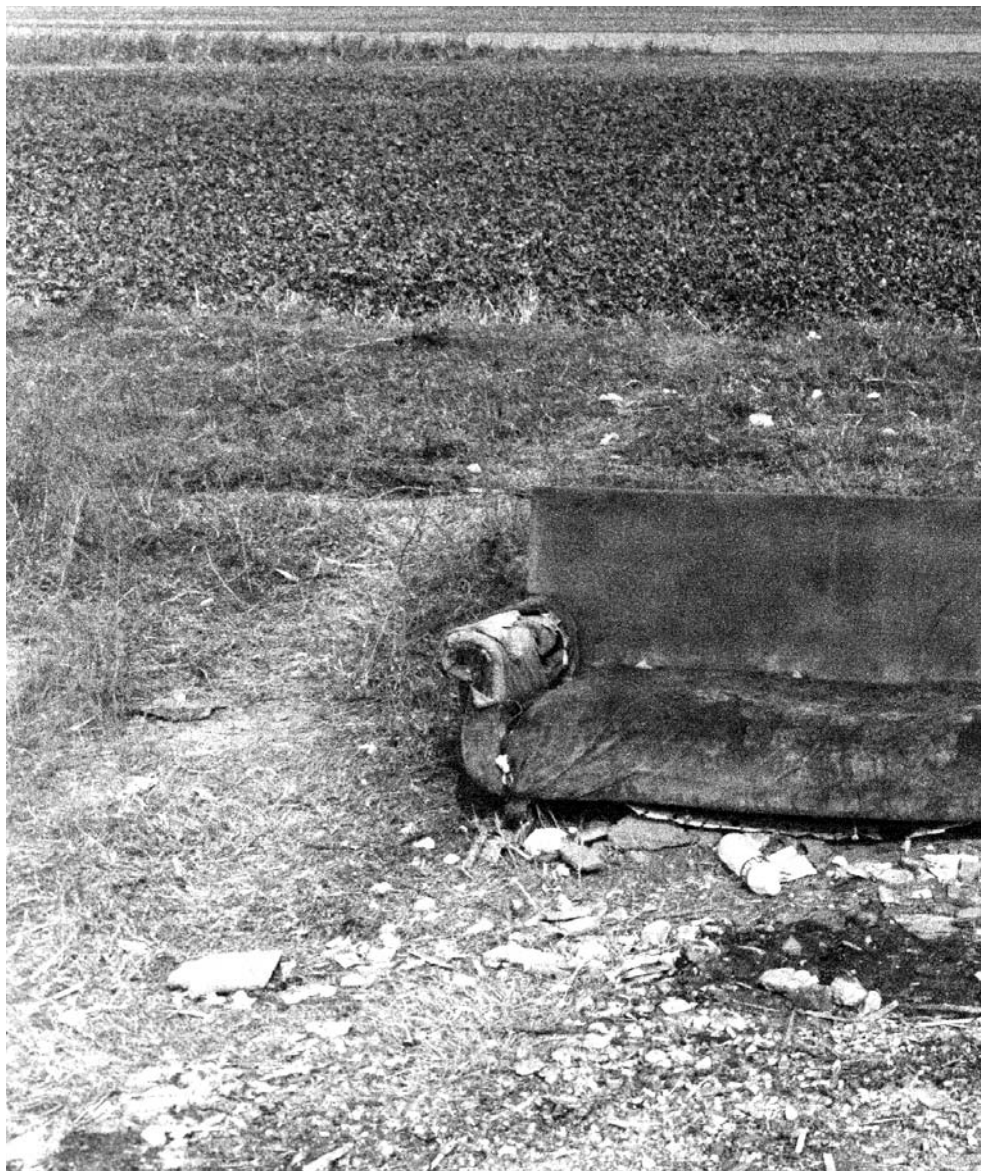
Turbulence

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SARAI READER 06: Turbulence

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In Turbulence

At some point during the closing half in the extra time of the Italy vs. France match in this year's FIFA World Cup final game on 8 July, the world changed. Again. The synapses in the brain of a man named Zinedine Zidane went into a state of momentary turbulence. A wave of rage surged into a headbutt that we mourned and saluted, seconds later, glued to television screens halfway across the world. The world seemed to change that instant, as it always does when the angel of the unexpected flaps his wings in the middle of a great game. Many prayers went unanswered that night.

All this was happening as e-mails bearing notes and queries about the book you now hold in your hands, or scan with your eyes on a screen, flew across the world. This book, a book titled *Turbulence*, was on its way into the world. A turbulence caught, distilled, held between covers, in these many pages, in this much ink, in these images, in this much white space.

Who knows what else was happening that night? What ripples had radiated out of that momentary collision between two footballers in Berlin? Or which wave had carried that headbutt with it, to crash on which distant shore of the global unconscious?

Someone had gone to sleep after a solitary vigil over a cache of explosives in Mumbai. An Israeli soldier stood at his checkpoint, somewhere along the border with Lebanon. A Hezbollah fighter spent a restless night thinking of his girlfriend. Perhaps a party of Bengali tourists in Srinagar sang songs just because it was too cold for them, and perversely, because Italy had won. Somewhere deep within the earth, below the ocean floor, not too far off the shoreline of Pandarang in Java, magma crackled. The seeds of a million cells of turbulence, inheritors of tsunamis, descendants of riots and curfews, progeny of hurricanes, modernity's questioning bastards, were germinating fractally, branching out into new constellations of storm. The world was at unrest. As it is, every night.

In the week and days that followed, bombs exploded in Mumbai, grenades were hurled at tourists in Srinagar, a war began in Lebanon, a tsunami hit Java, once again. There was rain. There was fire. There were signs of birth and death. There were quarrels and street fights, there were parties, the Richter scale quivered, there were demolitions. The twenty-first century rumbled on, as usual, turbulently.

If there were ever to be a weather report for our times, an audit of the climate in which we have grown accustomed to live, it would use the word *turbulence* often. We inhabit the vortex of storms, and smell sunshine. We are always prepared for rain. Our cities are sites of flood and fire. We live between tremors, power cuts and voltage surges. Agitations emerge and abate on our streets and on the airwaves, as if by accident. Books are burned, blogs are blocked, bourses dance mad tarantulas. We fly with seat belts fastened. Predictions are pronounced and dissembled in seconds. Bets are placed and lost, wagers made and found wanting. Insurance companies invoke acts of God. The more things change, the more they change.

The past decade, the first of our young turbulent new century, has opened up a series of transformations that seem to cumulatively define the contemporary, even as they themselves defy definition by virtue of the speed and immediacy with which they have made themselves manifest. Every mythic moment has begotten its Faustian other: globalisation has produced counter-globalisation, the crisis of the US empire was exposed on September 11 and via the quagmire in Iraq, the world of Islam is torn apart by internal strife and humiliation, the global West makes way for India Rising and Global China. Sovereignty, that old pillar of the modern state, stands in ruins, lost somewhere along the road from Westphalia to Beirut, along with all stable social theories of the world; citizenship, the university and liberal doctrines of rights. Property, the legal form of capital, is under attack not only from labour but also from modes of circulation and re-production. The kingdom of Piracy threatens the kingdom of Property. Massacres, media events, commodity fetishisms, security analysts and scam artists all clog the airwaves and the internet. In this world of exhilaration, death and survival, new practices have sought to define themselves, refusing to fall within old redemptive modes.

Turbulence is a practice for and of a time that has no name. This book, embodying that practice, is an eclectic index of an uncertain age. *Sarai Reader 06* uses Turbulence as a conceptual vantage point to interrogate all that is in the throes of terminal crisis, and to invoke all that is as yet unborn. We seek to examine turbulence as a global phenomenon, unbounded by the arbitrary lines that denote national and state boundaries in a political map of the world. We want to see areas of low and high pressure in politics, economy and culture that transcend borders, we want to investigate the flow of information and processes between downstream and upstream sites in societies and cultures globally, we want to witness surges and waves in ideas and practices as they crash against the shorelines of many dispersed locations. We want to inhabit moments of stillness and investigate the conditions that determine stasis in the middle of a tremendous upsurge of movement.

How do we anticipate, recover from, and remember these moments of sudden transformation? How do we look at the debris of the past and brace ourselves for the whirlwind coming our way from the future? How do we deal with the simultaneous pressures of knowing too much, or the anxiety of knowing too little about the world? How do we cope intellectually with the sudden dissolution of established ways of knowing and doing things? What does it mean to know and experience the pull of undercurrents; in society, politics, the economy? How do cities deal with the accumulation of complex infrastructural uncertainty? What happens when urban chaos strikes back at urban planning? How can we map the subterranean tectonic shifts and displacements that occur in culture and intellectual life? What are the histories of anxiety, exhilaration, dread, panic, ecstasy, disorientation and boredom like? How can we begin to narrate these histories? What does it take from us to tell stories, read poetry, make images and record experiences in the wake of turbulence?

These were the kinds of questions we wanted responses to when we invited contributions to *Turbulence*. In many ways, this desire grew out of a desire to revisit a landscape we had last traversed in *Sarai Reader 04: Crisis Media*; not so much in terms of reporting what was

going on from what could be called the ground zero of global consciousness, but to reflect on what it means to ride the storm out till its savage end. If *Reader 04* was about discovering a world in crisis, then *Reader 06* can be seen as being a book which takes the fact of a chaotic, turbulent world as a given, and then asks, Now what?^f

In the last year or so, we have trawled through a rich lode of texts and images that came our way from many parts of the world in response to this question. We heard from Tehran, from Dhaka, from Lagos, from Sao Paulo, from Beirut, from Shillong, from New York, from New Orleans, from Vijayawada, from Chennai, from Mumbai and of course, from Delhi. These contributions spoke not only of hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes, but also of the little storms of ordinary, commonplace life. They remembered conflicts as far away in time as the *ghadar* of 1857 in northern India, just as much as they registered the war that had just erupted in Lebanon. They indexed encounters that Kashmiris have in Delhi, and interpreted the sounds of picks and shovels laying entire neighbourhoods to waste. They spoke of storms in the mind, in the world of numbers and figures, and of the tempests that visit the body. They gave accounts of cities turning against themselves, of zones of disquiet at borders and frontiers, of the rise and demise of utopias, and of crises of meaning and value in contemporary art and current poetry. They spoke of accidents, speculations, conspiracies, leakages, flashmobs and of the strange weather that we have been having lately. They spoke in voices that spanned the entire spectrum from sobriety to exhilaration by way of doubt and despair. They laughed out loud at the madness they inhabited. They came to us in the form of photographs and drawings, comics and reportage, essays and interviews, letters and manifestos.

At an early stage in its gestation this year, the *Reader* was invited to participate in a community of publications ; a project called the Documenta 12 magazines .

This year, Documenta 12 Magazines addresses the issue of Modernity? *Sarai Reader 06* interprets this issue with an emphasis on the question mark that follows the abstract noun of this marker of temporality. We see our time, the one that sits in on Modernity's wake, as an opportunity for questioning, for admitting to radical uncertainties, and looking askance at the claims of truth and beauty. We are happy that this *Reader* marks a diffuse, dispersed engagement with discourses in contemporary art by featuring a large number of contributions by artists, curators and critics, and by paying a degree of focused attention to the perils of practice in contemporary art and literature. We hope that this enterprise succeeds in its mission of introducing a modicum of turbulence into the discursive realm of Documenta 12.

A book about Turbulence has to be a turbulent book. It cannot have an overarching claim to structure, or a pretence to order, no matter how hard we try to quieten the clamour in its pages. This book has no desire to come to rest, no hurry to arrive at any still centre. It will headbutt and get a few yellow and red cards as it plays its game. The only design it tries to follow is one that privileges surprises and the strange serendipity that emerges from the juxtapositions of the flotsam and jetsam that remain as the residue of a storm.



Transformations

Reflections on Uncertainty

A word cloud visualization of the word "turbulence". The word is repeated numerous times in various sizes, orientations, and colors (including shades of blue, green, and yellow). The words are arranged in a dense, swirling pattern, creating a sense of movement and chaos. The background is a solid light blue color.

The Time of Turbulence

R. KRISHNA

The early years of the 21st century are still cluttered with all the conceptual debris of the modern period: revolution, modernity, development, secularism, planning. It is also not possible to speak with easy confidence about representation, subjectivity, history, nation, class, or just about any of the concepts the previous generations grew up with. Who can remember today that for a long time the revolutionary 'moment' seemed ascendant? Acceleration was the inspiring mood of the long revolutionary epoch, from the French Jacobins to the avant-garde, from the Futurists (who worshipped war and speed), to the Bolsheviks, and the early years of the Chinese revolution. Mao's poem captures this mood the best:

So many deeds cry out to be done,
And always urgently;
The world rolls on,
Time presses.
Ten thousand years are too long,
Seize the day, seize the hour.
(FLPH, Beijing, 1965:46)

When Marxism went into a decisive spin by 1989, who could have known that this would also signal the crisis of so many other parallel ideas: liberal sovereignty and citizenship, secularism, development, and radical modernism in general? When the statues of Marx and Lenin came down in Tirana and Tbilisi, hidden cracks developed in the figures of Kant and Locke. "Down with all the hypotheses that have allowed the belief in a true world", Nietzsche once wrote bitterly, little realising that this would become the slogan of the 1980s. This crisis of the modern West's legacy has been blindingly fast, throwing into confusion and depression generations of state builders, committed activists and secular intellectuals.

The most intriguing casualty has been the idea of transition itself. The notion of modern transition was based on the idea of enlightened elites posing political, economic or utopian solutions to an existing contradiction.¹ The consensus on transition was so overwhelming that it was one thing that united liberals, nationalists and Marxists.² In the post-war period,

transitions of the kind imagined by its architects became less and less likely, and the questions began. In his dying days, Gramsci had agonised about this: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear". The first casualties of the transition imaginary were the developmentalists, followed rapidly by the radicals; the recent quagmire of the US Empire in Iraq has put to rest the neo-conservative dream of 'democracy' at the barrel of the gun.

Media 'Events'

As the old imaginaries retreated, we began to move at the 'speed of light', so much so that the past two decades seem like a blurred landscape of events: wars, massacres, catastrophes and more wars. Bombed cities and boom landscapes, famine and globalisation, bubble culture and staged events. Some called it postmodernism, some called it technological life, new empires, and new displacements. This crowding of the landscape of objects, events, images, shows up best in the over-informationalised screen of news television: with pop-ups, and scrolling text. What Indian viewers once associated with the pirate aesthetic of the local cable movie channel has now moved on to the main news channel. This produces a thematic non-synchronicity that would have bewildered and horrified the modernists: stock price tickers co-existing with tragic death reports, sports updates in the corner of the screen with melodramas. This mediascape weirdly coexists with violent urban displacements in the so-called boom regions of China and India. In Delhi, which has seen the some of the largest displacements of non-legal working-class settlements since the Emergency of 1975-77, the most unusual stories have actually filtered from *viral* networks: emails, blogs, broadsheets, conversations in the now-shattered localities. Like a virus, these media fragments often remain hidden, and ruthlessly ignore origins, be they that of commercial or 'alternative' media.

In the TV era of the last century, the dominant critical attitude to media was best summed up by Heidegger's well-known comment that television abolished every possibility of remoteness. This notion of the overwhelming centralising and disembodimenting role of the modern media experience, best epitomised by television, has been a mark of critical writing from Adorno to Debord. TV centralises, organises time, and represents the loss of the body to spectacle. This is best captured by the 'media event'. The 'media event' represents the absolute centralisation and the near-complete 'binding' of the media experience: we are all transfixed witnesses at the same moment. Do technological media then block the shock-effects of traumatic events, screening them, allowing them to be viewed from a distance? In her essay "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe", Mary Ann Doane suggests that television promises us the chance encounter with the 'reality' of catastrophe. Television shocks, and then repeatedly assures; a comforting presence in an insecure world. "Televisual catastrophe is thus characterised by everything which it is said not to be; it is expected, predictable, its presence crucial to television's operation"³. In reiterating the idea that technological media produces distance, 'concealing' and containing bodily violence, Doane is in line with a strand of thinking ranging from Heidegger to Debord. In this reading, the

only relationship to the screen can be that of the individual/household⁴ to the media object.⁵ The placelessness of the viewer is enacted by the placelessness of the transmission. We can 'witness' only as distanced, passive voyeurs.

Much of this discourse ignores the *contagious* relationship between bodies and technologies of representation, which have multiplied after the coming of the digital. Technological life is inherently turbulent, spatially dispersed and contagious ; and conflictual. It is this contagion that makes possible viral strategies⁶ of transmission; however, it also opens a serious intellectual challenge for any theory of the contemporary. A new theory of transmission after analog television is the challenge of our time. In short, it is a dreadful and violent time to be alive, but it is also a dynamic, strange and intellectually challenging one.

Conclusion

The worst thing about the century of turbulence is that the intellectual guarantees of an epoch passed are no longer available to us. We have the debris of a fast declining Western modernity falling everywhere.⁷ The great danger is that the intellectual debates of the next few years will be dominated by the academy ; a version of the Weberian prognosis in 1919 of a future world that is coolly distant, professional and productive.⁸ For those outside the historical 'West', this is not even an option. Here, most of the centres of dynamic intellectual activity may well be outside crisis-ridden and under-funded institutions, simply because there is no other option.

Walter Benjamin once suggested that the afterimages and outmoded objects of the previous epochs could be useful resources to be deployed towards a counter-memory of the present. To the debris of the previous century we can add artefacts and memories from our own time ; the violent displacements of contemporary capitalism have a greater tempo than the system in Benjamin's time. This is the paradox ; creating a counter-memory of the present that draws from the last century as well as the time of the Now ; this is the cruelty of the contemporary, which afflicts its inhabitants with a new delirium of acceleration without end.

NOTES

1. This idea of transition initiated by enlightened elites is of course different from an understanding of significant shifts in the long cycles of modern capitalism. For a useful argument, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (Verso, 1994, London).
2. The exception was the Nietzschean tradition. In 1920s Germany hovering on the brink of a crisis, there was a fascination of the avant-garde with decisionism. Here a sudden irruption or shift based on an aesthetic sensibility could not always be linked to a clear causal explanation. A range of diverse writers from Jünger to Schmitt drew from this tradition. In India, Gandhi's later writings represent a significant critique of the notion of modern transition. For Gandhi's ideas on the Constitution of India, see Shriman

- Narayan Agarwal, *Gandhian Constitution for Free India*, foreword by Mahatma Gandhi (Kitabistan Press, 1946, Allahabad). Cited in Douglas Lummis, "The Smallest Military Imaginable", forthcoming in *Alternatives*, 2006.
3. "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe". In (ed.) Patricia Mellencamp, *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Indiana University Press, 1990, Bloomington). p. 237.
 4. Marilyn Strathern shows how the Western idea of the self-contained individual self is often mapped on to nodes in networks. See her "Partners and Consumers: Making Relations Visible", in (ed.) A.D. Schrift, *The Logic of the Gift* (Routledge, 1977, London), pp. 292-311.
 5. For useful corrections, see Anna McCarthy, "From Screen to Site: Television's Material Culture, and its Place", in *October* 98 (Fall 2001), pp. 93-111, and Thomas Keenan, "Have You Seen Your World Today?" in *Art Journal* 54, No. 4 (Winter 1995), pp. 102-105.
 6. These viral strategies may be distinguished from recent efforts to reinvent the Western political avant-garde, best exemplified in Hardt and Negri's powerful books, *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004). These books revise and update a version of 1970s Italian radicalism, adding the important innovations of network capitalism and global millennialism. Hardt and Negri's work, however, remains fundamentally West-centred, both in their understanding of capitalism and their deployment of a political critique of modernity. At the end of *Empire*, the authors call on the multitudes to follow St Francis. This representational innocence is remarkable in the context of politics in Europe today.
 7. This is not an exaggeration. Despite the Indian neo-liberal elites' fascination with the West, it is clear that the centre of global accumulation is shifting to East Asia and China. The structural and intellectual consequences of this (the first time since the 16th century) are too wide ranging to go into here. While the 'West' fights political Islam and disciplines its immigrant populations, China remains the most dynamic region of the globe: the highest growth-rate, the highest inequality and the highest number of incidents of social unrest worldwide. Marx once sardonically said that the circuit of knowledge follows the circuit of money. The philosophical discussions on the rise of China/East Asia will perhaps begin in 15 years. The Indian elites, who are West-centred and smug, are recent converts to a bizarre brand of neo-liberalism. The myth of the self-regulating market was exposed long ago in Karl Polanyi's classic *The Great Transformation* (1944).
 8. The North American University, with its now fully professional setting (in contrast to the late 1960s and 1970s) is the most favoured site for this research. One of the significant accomplishments of professionalism is that the word 'capitalism' has been effectively been banished from most intellectual discourse.

The Father of Long/Fat Tails Interview with Benoît Mandelbrot

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

Hans Ulrich Obrist: I wanted to ask you when your interest in science actually started, if one can localise the beginnings.

Benoît Mandelbrot: I had the fortune and the misfortune of being the nephew of a very well known mathematician. When I was thirteen, my uncle became professor at the Collège de France, and so I always knew that becoming a scientist was an option. But what kind of scientist? A decision taken in the middle of the war, under conditions that were quite dreadful in many ways, has marked me for life. First of all, in January 1944 (I remember very well how it happened) I realised that my gift for shape and geometry was truly extreme. When the professor read the problem that was a question of algebra or of analysis, I did not hear formulas, but saw pictures.

HO: That was in Lyon?

BM: Yes. Clearly, you have read a great deal about me! Geometry came easily, a good reason for loving it. Second, it provided me with a competitive advantage; in my generation, nobody else had this gift to the same degree. Another advantage: this gift does not fade with age. All my old friends complain that they find it increasingly difficult to sit down and write new formulas. But the ability to look for structure in pictures where everybody else sees a mess does not decline with age as much. That may help explain why, past eighty, I still work effectively almost full-time.

I also made another discovery about myself: I deeply wanted to identify some field where I could emulate Kepler ; not Newton [laughs], not Copernicus, but Kepler. I put an extremely high value on the precise moment when an idea which is very abstract and

removed from any applications ; call it a *toy* ; is made over into a *tool* and used to understand part of the messiness of nature. I constantly search for situations where a toy can become a tool. For example, I like to design my books myself. I find it particularly fulfilling to start with an idea and contribute to every step till it has become a book.

HO: Like the book you wrote with Michael Frame in 2002, *Fractals, Graphics and Mathematics Education*?

BM: In that book we had some freedom of design, but not enough, because the publisher has a very specific format that I didn't choose.

HO: There are books that are completely designed by you, like artists' books almost.

BM: *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, which came out in 1982 and is my major work, was entirely designed to my precise specifications, including every picture. The official designer became a good friend and prefers to describe himself as the co-designer because he made the pictures better in quality and size, but followed very precisely what I wanted.

HO: It is very interesting that in terms of the art world images are important, and very often in science there is an opposite approach, of not trusting images. You told previous interviewers that in Lyon, when you had your first experience of your mathematical skills, images played a very big role. I was wondering if you could tell me about this importance of images, which is a little bit against the grain of what most scientists do.

BM: It certainly stands completely against the ideology of the 1960s and '70s, when the sciences were sharply classified according to whether images are or are not important. A German-born friend of mine, a great biologist and philosopher, went so far as to theorise that progress in science consists in eliminating pictures as much as possible. Mathematics was perfect because it had completely banished pictures^a even from elementary textbooks. I put the pictures back. This was received in a very hostile fashion by most of my colleagues. Since then, the opposition to pictures has weakened, simply because they have been so extraordinarily fruitful and because humans are continually changing.

Scientists are not separate from their society and technology. When I was a child, books had no pictures because of economics: pictures were expensive; so books were very dry and grey by design. Russian books, almost until the fall of the Soviet Union, remained extremely grey, whereas now the environment in which everybody is raised is extremely colourful, rich in design. The young mathematicians cannot help being more open to the influence of pictures, but nobody claims that pictures are as important to his or her work as to mine.

HO: In the art world, there have been moments like the Black Mountain College with John Cage and Buckminster Fuller that have been amazing realisations of trans-disciplinarity; such moments usually produce the most interesting expressions of art and architecture. In terms of your education, you had on the one hand the École Polytechnique, a kind of trans-disciplinary school, but you had also this practical experience with IBM, where a lot of disciplines formed a pool of knowledge. In the current world of art and

architecture, this fear of pooling knowledge is still very widespread. Could you tell me about these experiences?

BM: IBM was a quite an experience, but more important was my age during World War II, and the effects of moving from Poland to France and then to the US. In many ways, I was very under-educated or mis-educated; for years I was either very much older than my classmates, or I was with the class but not influenced by it. During my early years my mother did not let me go to school, but had me tutored by an uncle, not the famous one, who did not teach me anything in a dogmatic fashion. The various schools I went to didn't put a strong stamp on me.

However, the IBM I knew for 35 years no longer exists. It is now a very large corporate development centre concerned with fulfilling Wall Street's and the stockholders' expectations. Earlier, IBM felt responsible for the whole development of the computer, and also had an extremely enlightened policy of enabling creative freedom, contingent on company approval. This policy has been extremely fruitful. It was a very special period; I am very glad to have stumbled there when it was beginning, and to have stayed for 35 years.

HO: Did you have exchanges there with other scientists?

BM: Exchange is something one chooses to have or not. I have written and co-authored many articles and books with people in my own field, and also in other fields where I have noticed something peculiar with regard to an image, and felt the need to quantify that.

HO: You were one of the very last students of the mathematician John von Neumann. Can you tell me about this?

BM: I never worked with von Neumann in the sense of asking him for suggestions. I am very pleased to have spent some time with him, though our methods were not compatible. He worked in logic, then in physics, economics, pure mathematics and applied mathematics. Logic and the computer were impressively integrated, but the other fields, in the main, had very little in common, so his other works might have been done by different persons without losing particular substance. To the contrary, all my work involves one theme or a few themes very closely linked together and could be viewed as contributing to a single highly interdisciplinary topic.

HO: Albert Hoffman, the inventor of LSD, told me in an interview that chance played a big role in his discovery. How did you discover fractals, and was chance a crucial factor, as in the case of Hoffman?

BM: Completely. Early in my life, I was enormously influenced by a very short article in *Scientific American* that my uncle received from the author, his colleague Joseph Walsh. He himself was not interested and had thrown it into a wastebasket. He took it out, and gave it to me. The article was a review of a book by George Kingsley Zipf, concerning the distribution of word frequencies. I was fascinated. The question arises: what if I hadn't gone to see my uncle that day, or if he had not thrown the article into the wastebasket, or if it had not been sent to him?

Later in life, an equally important influence was exerted by a diagram I happened to see by chance on a dirty blackboard at Harvard, when I was going to lecture.

HO: Some drawing from a previous lecture?

BM: Yes. I saw a very specific shape with alternating convex and concave portions. I looked at the blackboard, then at my host, and asked him to explain. He did so, saying the topic was entirely different from my work. But the diagram proved that in fact it was very close. That chance event provoked me to study financial markets, and resulted in 1963 in a paper titled "The Variation of Certain Speculative Prices". It became extremely famous and very influential, a *Citation Classic*, especially then and now. The story is told in a book I co-authored with the journalist Richard Hudson, *The (Mis)Behavior of Markets: A Fractal View of Risk, Ruin, and Reward*, which came out in 2004.

These two chance events raise a serious question. The blackboard might have been cleaned before I came in, or made so dirty by overwriting that this drawing would not have been visible. Things of this sort affect a life.

"What would have happened?" Quite possibly, neither phenomenon would have been noticed by anybody; the delay, scientifically speaking, might have cost 40 years in the case of the study of prices, because for 40 years the underlying data was known but not taken seriously, and dismissed. Or my work in this area might have been postponed even further because the conditions which interest so many people might not have changed. The book I mentioned might not have been written at all.

An odd thing is that chance has also helped me on many other occasions. Louis Pasteur is credited with the observation that chance can only help the well-prepared mind. I also think that my long string of lucky breaks can be credited to my mode of paying attention: I look at funny things and never hesitate to ask questions. Most people would not have noticed the dirty blackboard, or looked at the article that my uncle gave me because he was not interested.

Let me add a comment. That reprint in 1951 and that diagram on the chalkboard both concerned examples of what are now called long-tailed or fat-tailed distributions. These evanescent episodes made me the first well-trained mathematician to take those tails seriously. For this reason, I have heard myself being called "the father of long tails". Long η or fat η tails are an intimate part of the fractal family, so that term and the more common alternative "the father of fractals" do not contradict each other.

HO: With regard to those two chance events, you remarked in an earlier interview that the connection between them appeared wild to you on the first night, but by the second night, you had become accustomed to it. Can you tell me about that moment?

BM: I couldn't do anything about my intuitive speculations until the computer became available and I decided to make it into a tool of experimental mathematics. Observe that my best-known discovery was not due to the availability of exceptionally good pictures at IBM. Quite to the contrary, my best work was performed in 1980. While I was a visiting professor at Harvard, I had to deal with complicated research conditions within a very bad system. The pictures seen on the first night seemed incomprehensible; the second night, they became more coherent. Within a few days they had become completely familiar, as though one had always seen them. Incredible! The set to which

they belonged soon became known as the Mandelbrot Set, and you know how popular it became. But early on, most of the mathematicians who followed my work didn't like the idea of a mathematical discovery based on a picture. All that is discussed in detail in my book *Fractals and Chaos: The Mandelbrot Set and Beyond*, which Springer published in 2004.

HO: Artists and architects have always been interested in this idea of the multi-fractal in relationship to the phenomenon of turbulence. When did this element enter your work?

BM: I didn't realise that architects and painters were interested in multi-fractals, though I knew of their interest in ordinary fractals, uni-fractals. But I am not surprised. It had to come. In 1963, a paper I had written with J.M. Berger, titled "A New Model of Error Clustering on Telephone Circuits", was published in the IBM Journal of Research and Development. It looked very technical but was in fact very mysterious. A bit earlier, during the Cold War, the great Soviet scientist Andrei Kolmogorov had published in *The Journal of Fluid Mechanics* (and other places), an article that became famous, but which I found impossible to understand. I thought I could understand Kolmogorov through the paper I co-authored with Berger, but soon realised that this was the wrong path. It took me several years of extremely hard work to conclude that Kolmogorov had made a mistake. It is still very difficult to state this about a man of his brilliance. What he published was mathematically wrong, without any doubt. By re-doing it properly, I developed a multi-fractal model that addressed the intermittence of turbulence but also has turned out to be fundamental to our understanding of the variation of financial prices. All that is retold in my book *Multifractals and 1/f Noise: Wild Self-Affinity in Physics (1963-1976)*, published by Springer in 1999.

HO: The late artist Alighiero Boetti conceptualised systems of order and disorder in which the order also simultaneously implies a disorder. For instance, he compiled a list of one thousand of the world's longest rivers, published in a book in 1977^a. Obviously, there is no absolutely fixed length of river, or a single reliable source, there are multiple and varying sources. This project involved immense geographic and scientific measurements, but with a preordained ambiguity in the results. Is this different from your notions of order and disorder?

BM: The general observation, that the different sources of rivers account for their different lengths, had already been made by hydrologists. The specific explanation I gave in 1967 concerned the fact that if techniques explicitly designed to study order are applied to disorder, the results will demand careful re-examination. Observe that order and disorder are distinctions at the level of mechanisms, structure, interactions in the system. I like to focus on the basic pattern.

A primitive man or woman saw very few, simple, smooth shapes. For example, the full moon is a simple shape, a circle. The pupil and the iris of the eye are circles. Some berries are spherical. But in the wild, almost all the shapes are extremely rough and complicated; there is a sharp distinction between the smooth/simple and the rough/complicated. Historically, geometers concentrated on the properties of a very

few smooth shapes and physicists were also significantly devoted to smooth, regular behaviour, with perhaps sometimes a complication of the kind that the French mathematician René Thom theorises as "catastrophe". But trees are not smooth at all, neither are mountains and clouds.

A remarkably large number of artists had no vocabulary to express their grasp of the nature of fractals, yet such an understanding comes through very clearly in their work.

HO: You have frequently cited the Japanese artist Hokusai as an example of this sensitivity.

BM: Hokusai was at his peak around 1800^a almost our contemporary. But history provides examples of many earlier painters or philosophers who were very aware of complicated shapes with fractal structure. Claude Lorrain, a French painter who worked mostly in Italy, painted landscapes that claim to be realistic, but in fact are extraordinarily simplified and easily interpreted in fractal terms. Historically, painters have always seen the possibilities of fractal structure, but it did not develop into a geometry, since very few wrote about it and probably none read about it.

HO: "Art happens", as stated by the 19th-century American painter James Whistler. That moment of fractal roughness "happened".

BM: Whistler was a great painter. So was the English painter Joseph Turner. His extraordinary wild images of ships burning in the sea perfectly combine Euclidean and fractal shapes. Eugene Delacroix, in his *Advice to a Young Painter*, which can be found in the artist's published letters, showed that he understood fractality intuitively, but at that time nobody could follow up.

I feel very privileged to have filled the role of bringing together phenomena that scientists had missed, and painters or photographers have implemented but never formalised.

HO: You told an interviewer that you have almost a collection, a Malraux kind of *musée imaginaire* of such artworks. How is this archive constituted?

BM: At this point it is mostly in my head^a an imaginary museum housing an imaginary collection of great paintings that come from different periods and styles but are linked by the artists' awareness of the splendid totality of fractal structures.

The museum would also have empty frames for cultures in which fractality was absent or negligible. For example, I think that the term 'Islamic' art is not useful, in fact is misleading, because Arabic art is not fractal, and Persian art very often is. Shiite and Sunni Muslims differ in many ways, including their art.

Some cultures have a very strong fractal aspect; Persian, Indian and Mughal architecture often show the contours of smaller domes within larger ones^a On the other hand, the Bauhaus was certainly anti-fractal with a passion. Perhaps this is why the Bauhaus has always been so unpopular, because humanity prefers architecture that offers a great deal of variety.

HO: That whole architectural movement of Max Taut, Hermann Finsterlin, the German expressionist group, was fractal. Not the Bauhaus.

BM: The Bauhaus reacted against the architectural complexity of late Beaux-Arts style; it worshipped the purity of the cube, and so on. Today, much of that is completely *passé*.

The first time I saw the Church of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, it had been reduced to two towers that Antoni Gaudi had himself designed; later I watched the process of its being completed, and was sorry. The two original towers had an extraordinary variety of detail, whereas the total monument as it now emerges is monotonous and decorative. The spirit of Gaudi was very simplistically rendered.

HO: Is contemporary architecture such as that by Zaha Hadid, or the deconstructivist Frank Gehry, fractal in nature?

BM: No. I find Gehry repetitive, though photographs of his Museo Guggenheim in Bilbao suggest that it is impressive. The relationships between the smooth masses of various sizes are fractal.

HO: In terms of urbanism, can one say that some cities are more fractal than others?

BM: I became interested in that aspect through someone I knew rather well, the late Yoshinobu Ashihara, a very successful architect in Tokyo.

HO: Was he part of Metabolism, the 1960s architectural movement that based its work on a theory of dynamic buildings and cities, rejecting the concept of fixed form and function, and instead advocating the creation of the whole by the accumulation of deconstructed, dissipated components?

BM: No. He was quite a traditional architect, in fact, an architect of the court. In one of his books, he compared the urban design of the Chinese or American city, both contained by square grids, and of Tokyo, a complicated city that includes chunks of everything; he felt that Tokyo's variety, novelty and unpredictability was generally not appreciated. Ashihara was a brilliant thinker, but his buildings were quite conventional.

HO: John Brockman, the editor and publisher of the online intellectual forum Edge in New York, told me about your near-mythical appearance at the Reality Club salon hosted by Edge, which he says was the most successful event he has ever organised. Have you had dialogues with visual artists, just as you have had with architects?

BM: Less so, unfortunately. That may reflect the problem visual art experiences at this point. It's not as great a period for artists as for architects. The installations demonstrate ingenuity but are very impermanent.

On the other hand, I have very strong connections with composers, who inhabit an entirely different world. In particular, György Ligeti came to me and confided that, until he saw my pictures, he had not understood an important aspect of music: it is not free to do as it pleases, because it must be fractal.

When Ligeti received a prize in New York, a major article appeared in which he listed the greatest designs ever. The list included the Book of Kells, the Taj Mahal^a and the Mandelbrot Set! That was an extremely strong statement, and I was very pleased to meet him shortly afterwards. We have had very interesting times together, including serious public discussions.

HO: I have never met him, but spoke to him once on the phone, some years ago. He had then said we would be meeting for an interview a few years hence because, as he put it, "I still have twenty years of music to write before one thinks of taking stock of all my works!"

BM: While he was a visiting composer at Yale for one or two weeks, a professor of piano played many of his pieces in his honour. I was dumbfounded by the quality of her playing. Till recently, Ligeti's piano repertoire was recognised as splendid but restricted to a few specialists. But this period was over. The lady was not a famous virtuoso but 'merely' a professor of piano at Yale's very good music school, yet she played Ligeti extremely well. And it was fascinating that Ligeti commented on his own works without the least self-indulgence, in fact, with remarkable ferocity. He said, for example, that to understand a certain piece one had to know that it had been written in the 1950s, during the time he worked in Darmstadt. So many talented musicians worked there that "one would do anything to get noticed!"

After he received the prize I mentioned earlier, he felt free to do as he pleased. What he wanted to do at that time was to write for piano; it was then that he really started to compose for this instrument.

HO: Ligeti and you are both somewhat in the same 'league', in terms of creativity.

BM: Thank you.

HO: Your great books are quite recent; and your work is ongoing. Yet several mathematicians have told me that the minds in this field produce their best at around 25 years of age^a The pressure to produce remarkable findings very quickly is a Damocles' sword hanging over their heads. You are more like a writer or a composer, in the sense that maturity brings about a certain evolution.

BM: The story that all mathematicians peak at 25 is a popular myth more than a reality. It is also a self-fulfilling prophecy, because of the fact that mathematicians who have not done anything remarkable before the age of 30 are pushed to the side and ignored. On the other hand, musicians continue indefinitely, but so have many mathematicians!

Some time back, I tried to draw up an informal list of those who have done their best work late in life. Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell published their celebrated *Principia Mathematica* between 1910 and 1913. Therefore, Whitehead was about 50, and before the *Principia* had not produced anything of significance; Russell was just 30. Yet the cover page lists the co-authors in inverse alphabetic order, meant to emphasise that the senior author was Whitehead. He had been in charge of the mathematical part of the book but Russell was a famous high aristocrat, well known for pacifist views; he went to prison, etc. As a result, *Principia Mathematica* is usually considered the work of Russell 'helped' by Whitehead, while the inverse would be more just.

Another deeply entrenched myth is that a mathematician who interrupts his work for 10 years "forgets everything", "loses his ability" and consequently is destined to disappear. Inversely, a writer or composer can stop for 10 years and come back stronger than before ^a

HO: Can you describe your current theory of "negative dimension", on which you are planning to write a book?

BM: This topic seems completely eccentric, like a story from *Alice in Wonderland*, something like the Cheshire cat who vanishes leaving a smile that then vanishes gradually. But in fact this is a very serious topic I am investigating with a friend.

Eventually I hope to compile a small book covering everything I have written on this subject here and there, and the work of other, more recent, authors.

Increasingly negative dimensions characterise objects that become increasingly empty. At first glance this may appear as a kind of bad science fiction, but it is very practical and makes possible to attach a number to the notion of a "progressive emptiness", which elaborates on the common notion of simple emptiness.

It is a concept one should not romanticise, so I have recently decided to write of negative pro-dimension. It promises to become a new domain. Small or big^a? The future will tell.

HO: Do you have any utopian plans that you have not been able to see through?

BM: By doing 'one's best', one can do amazing things. I have a thousand plans at the same time.

My extremely complicated life has allowed two choices. One consists in setting priorities, staying committed to them, and doing everything possible to ensure that things are realised, in the order of priorities. The alternative policy judges, according to the circumstances, what is feasible and what is not, and then improvises with the means at one's disposal at a given moment. At IBM, I was absolutely systematic in following the non-systematic policy, which enabled me to do many things. I did not give a thought to seeking perfect, optimal conditions for seeing a plan through. I always concentrated on doing 'sufficiently well' *here and now*.

After retiring from IBM, I taught mathematics at Yale for 18 years. What was easy at IBM was difficult at Yale, and vice versa. I am keen to finish this work on negative dimensions; it has certainly started well. Also, befitting my age, I should not defer too long the completion of my memoirs. It must not be done too early, but one should not wait too long either.

HO: Time is everything^a

BM: Yes, especially in the domain of speculation and risk-taking. I am well into Volume I of my memoirs, and the remainder is sketched out. I do not know how many volumes I will write, but they will be different from each other. My memory is still very good, so I do everything from memory. When I am not sure, of course, I still verify! Nevertheless, it is very important for me to separate the things that are stored in my archives and in my memory. Later, if my memory starts to fail, I may be forced to privilege the archives.

I have led a complicated life, and observe various domains from various angles; hence I do not describe structures from a standard point of view. My perspectives are unconventional and multiple, and I believe I can contribute a little to history.

There is also the question of trans-disciplinarity, carried out with true contemporary geniuses. I have mentioned Ligeti; and there is another composer, Charles Wuorinen, with whom I did an extraordinary show titled "Music and Fractals" at the Guggenheim Museum in 1990. It is fascinating to see how two people from such different cultures can collaborate, if they desire to do so.

My book *The (Mis)behaviour of Markets: A Fractal View of Risk, Ruin and Reward*, published in 2004, was difficult to write. My collaborator Richard Hudson, managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, was a student of mathematics prior to becoming a journalist; this made the communication of certain ideas easier. He wrote the body of

the text; next, I verified everything and we discussed the text a thousand times. This book is reaching out to a wide public. It complements my earlier book *Fractals and Scaling in Finance: Discontinuity, Concentration, Risk*, which demanded our competence in mathematics; this was published by Springer in 1999.

HO: The notion of risk explored in your book on markets leads me to ask if it is possible to have a 'fractal' view of the art market.

BM: Absolutely. The inequality of prices on the art market is astounding: from tens of millions of dollars to only a few dollars. I became deeply interested in the paintings of Frantisek Kupka, the first avant-garde Czech painter, because a certain period of his work was clearly 'fractal'. A major part of Kupka's paintings belonged to a Jewish banker in Prague who had financially supported Kupka, disregarding the fact that the artist was anti-Semitic. Those paintings, first confiscated by the Nazis and then by the Communists, have returned to his heirs. But export restrictions affect the market, and another patron, a mysterious German lady, also owns many of his paintings and can clearly influence their value.

HO: You told an interviewer that in the film *Star Trek 2*, there was a slightly swirling multi-fractal method, used to create some special effects. Did the filmmakers consult you?

BM: Not at all! To my disappointment, this film nowhere credited my scientific publications. *Star Trek 2* was made by Lucas Films; they simply bought my 1977 book, *Fractals: Form, Chance and Dimension*, which was not an extravagant investment for them! [Laughs]. The mountains in the film were made using a variant of my method. When the film was first released in California, I did not go to the pre-release show, simply because I did not think that it was worth the travel. However, when it came to my neighbourhood, something quite surprising took place. One of my assistants who had seen the film conveyed the bad news that the special effects created with fractals had been edited out. The next day my wife and I went to the film, and the fractals were staring at both of us. My assistant had been misled by the realistic treatment; he had not seen the fractals, as he was still not used to them.

Every graphic design class teaches fractals, and in commercials it is a commonplace technique, an unnoticed daily application^a

HO: The contemporary writer Fernando Arrabal mentions you in almost all his interviews, especially when it comes to the subject of fate and memory.

BM: Arrabal has written many articles on me, based on his own observations and on interviews that he has read. In addition, many of his recent novels have realistic characters who seem to be inspired by my personality. I do not read all the books that have a character who resembles me. I prefer novels that feature my mathematical work, which usually means the Mandelbrot Set. In 1990, the well-known science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke published a book based on the Mandelbrot Set. Titled *The Ghost from the Grand Banks*, it is about an expedition to find the wreck of the Titanic. The cover shows a Mandelbrot Set with the Titanic sinking in the centre. Very nice.

HO: In the introduction of your book on markets, Richard Hudson says it is written a bit like a polyphonic opera with an interplay of voices. Do you agree?

BM: I am passionate about opera. There was a time when I went every second day to the opera house and spent many hours a day listening to opera records. I find that it is one of the more powerful modes of expression. I am a great admirer of Mozart and Verdi; I like Rossini, but not Wagner that much. In the 19th century, opera was understood as a very popular way of writing. Ask people today if the 20th century has been good to opera, and they will probably say no. Today, opera is widely considered an 'outdated', 'obsolete' form of art that requires justification and explanation. This is completely false! Several of the most extraordinary operas in the history of music were written in the 20th century. *Wozzeck*, almost horribly simple, is a stunning instance that grew from an odd specialty almost to the centre of the repertoire. So is Francis Poulenc's remarkably melodramatic and powerful *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* (Dialogues of the Carmelites).

HO: Would you consider *Wozzek*, the famous 1925 atonal opera by the expressionist composer Alban Berg, and works by Verdi, to be 'fractal' operas?

BM: There is surely a fractal element, as opera has to reveal various levels for it to be effective; and there are so many elements one can connect. What I find truly interesting in opera is^a the opera itself! I love the human voice.

Hudson was probably implying that it is important in scientific work to take a view and a presentation which is 'active'; and nothing is more active than an opera! Many scientific articles are completely flat because they are written for people who do not have to be convinced. They are part of a small circle within a well-established domain; they write for each other, know more or less everybody, or are introduced by their thesis supervisors or mentors. As a result, style is a very secondary and unimportant thing for them. In my case, the fact that I write for an unknown public necessarily influences and shapes my style. Whether it is opera or Greek drama, one must know how to enter into a subject quickly because one cannot assume that the public will wait to understand. One has to be able to speak to people in their style, motivate and perhaps amuse the reader a little.

HO: Paraphrasing the title of Rainer Maria Rilke's magnificent 1903 text *Letters to a Young Poet*, do you, in 2005, have advice for a young researcher or a young mathematician?

BM: This has become very difficult^a In Rilke's time, poetry was a fully defined form of art. The problem with science at the moment is the rapidity of that change. By good fortune I managed to work in science 'solo', with a restricted number of collaborators. I have never worked on an article with more than two or a few authors. This makes me a rare exception. Most science is very different today. Hundreds of people join in writing an article, and their work leans on a laboratory employing a thousand people^a When young people come and ask for advice, I have to say that both my personal and informal way of practicing science was already difficult in my time, but now it has become inconceivable. One has to be very flexible, more than before. My only advice would be to always keep your options open, because it is possible that you might have to change domains^a

HO: There are many anecdotal stories about well-known mathematicians and scientists such as Jacques Hadamard and Geoffrey Harold Hardy, whose critical ideas came to them intuitively, in unexpected circumstances. This has led to discussions about the nature and sources of our knowledge. My scientist friend Israel Rosenfield asks about your view of knowledge, how the brain works, your ideas about memory, perception and consciousness⁸ Is your approach to this reflected in your own work?

BM: I've skimmed through Hadamard's book, but never read it properly; anyway, it was written late in his life, with much help from his daughter. I've also read *The Mathematician's Apology* by Hardy. Indeed, the question of chance is very disturbing. If I not had paid attention to those pictures, my science would have been very different, and I might have become a different person. Perhaps ; but this is not for me to judge ; science would have progressed differently.

Hadamard was a wise and balanced man. Hardy was an ideologue with ideas about 'pure mathematics' that I consider ridiculous; yet these ideas keep being revived, then collapse, and so on. The canonical example Hardy gave of 'pure mathematics', with no applications outside of the self-interest of studying the topic, was number theory in general, and the study of prime numbers in particular. Number theorists such as Hardy took pride in doing work that had absolutely no military significance. However, this vision was shattered when in the 1970s prime numbers became the basis for the creation of public key cryptography algorithms. This is a use that Hardy, a pacifist, would have hated.

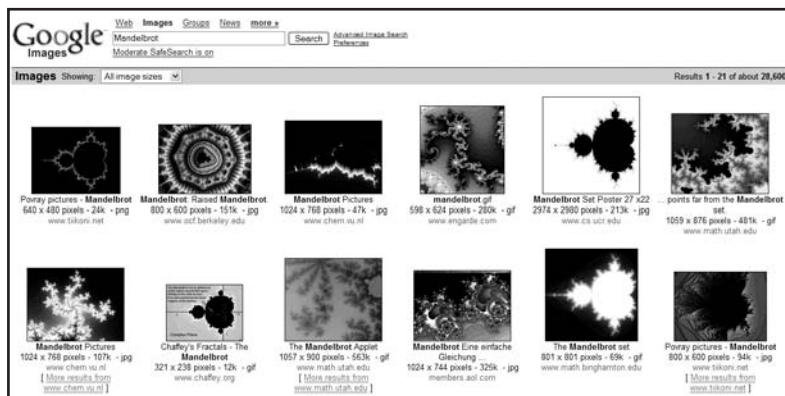
In relation to the reality of mathematics, I am a forceful moderate, not an ideologue. When discovering the Mandelbrot Set, I had absolutely no impression of inventing it. While nobody had seen it before, I had a very strong feeling that it existed but remained hidden because nobody had the insight to identify it. All that is actually a great mystery. Mathematics and music are crucial achievements of humanity, and continue to expand in directions quite different from what the ideologues expect.

HO: Alighiero Boetti, the artist we discussed earlier, repeatedly turned to your work; for him, it was an example of resistance against the homogenising forces of globalisation, since your perspectives foreground variety, diversity, complexity. Today we are in a very different moment, of a rapidly expanding and intensifying globalisation. What is your point of view here, in relation to your study of markets?

BM: This question is far too complicated to be answered in a few words, so I prefer not to try. I don't think globalisation necessarily decreases variety, but this is a tentative opinion. I enjoy diversity enormously. I favoured it in my choice of topics to pursue, and I still do my best to help it increase rather than vanish.

HO: A wonderful conclusion. Thank you very much.

Benoît Mandelbrot, in his long career, has relied on the good eye to interpret mathematics in its widest scope. At its purest end, he phrased a number of new and extremely difficult conjectures, grounded in interpretation of computer graphics. He contributed to many sciences from physics to finance, often solving down-to-earth questions by using reputedly esoteric mathematics. He has drawn bridges over the chasms that separate mathematics, science and technology from one another and from the interests of the common man and the child. His life work – the fractal geometry of roughness in nature and culture – has been acknowledged by the 1993 Wolf Prize for Physics (which hailed him for having "changed our view of nature"), the 2003 Japan Prize for Science and Technology, and many other awards. He is IBM Fellow Emeritus, Sterling Professor Emeritus of Mathematical Sciences at Yale University, and Battelle Fellow.
www.math.yale.edu/mandelbrot



Place

RENÉE GREEN

These writings on the theme of turbulence grew out of reflections on recent daily encounters, as well as out of encounters with texts I've been engaging. This text includes journal-style entries and a listing of reflections on textual references.

1. April 2006

Unité d'Habitation? is the title of the exhibition I'm developing to present in Paris in June 2006. Literally, in English, it can be thought of as *Unity of Habitation?* or, obliquely, as *United (in)Habitation?* It refers to the name of Le Corbusier's building project *Unités d'Habitation*, his proposal for collective living. These structures were built in and imagined for different locations, including Marseilles (1946-1952), Rezé-lès-Nantes (1953), Berlin (1956), Briey-en-Forêt (1957), Strasbourg (projected 1951), Marseilles-Sud (projected 1951) and Meaux (projected 1956). I inhabited one of these structures, Firminy-Vert (1968) in 1993, but the title (Le Corbusier's term) more broadly refers to the possibility to inhabit, as a material condition, in addition to inhabiting as a state of being. The title is also meant to raise questions concerning the profundity of how to inhabit places with others, living and dead, and what form of social and historical circumstance is related to who can inhabit, where and how.



This morning I've been reading Czeslaw Milosz's *The Land of Ulro*, published in 1985. I find it describes different states I feel, especially while here in this region of the US, the

Bay Area of Northern California, as well as in relation to being an artist and working as an academic, somehow.

2. April 2006

Questions about the privileging of pain. Why should histories of suffering from any region be viewed as exemplary, when all suffering in its many dimensions is horrible? Even the dominance of media diffusion and saturation that the US and Western Europe have achieved can still be acknowledged as presenting only very partial views of any form of claimed or described suffering. Beyond that, why can't it be understood that no form of suffering is exemplary, as the human condition itself is predicated upon suffering? Why perpetuate suffering?

These questions grew out of a dinner conversation. A disturbing incident was described by friends. The location of this incident was a dinner they'd attended in the Bay Area. They were requested to verbally prove their ownership of, or allegiance to, identity-based culturally designated territories within the international art terrain. Who's the exemplary suffering representative of suffering peoples? Rights for legitimacy were claimed by others present. Who most authentically could represent the projected disenfranchised sector from an artist's perspective? It seemed like an absurd premise. As if that were a goal anyone would want to achieve, rather than one of freedom from even those classificatory restraints. During this occasion, these friends were put on the spot to represent their legitimacy: they were being perceived to be responsible for representing oppression since they hailed from New Delhi; the terms for evaluation, however, were inadequate and inappropriate. Yet another gap amongst those espousing progressive stances, willfully ignorant of more complex phenomena and history, undermining the possibility of coming to terms with a more profound understanding of the contemporary world, because of a narrow territorialism. Why perpetuate suffering?

3. April 2006

Back in New York^a

Now I'm thinking about the theme of turbulence. I may write about the turbulence involved in the struggle to represent history, all that is 'partially buried', the intentional deletions, 'some chance operations', my Sisyphean attempts at creating an 'index of oblivion', the confrontations while one still lives to write dismissed histories back into what will be recognised as History. Many people's annotations. Many people's sense of ownership. The difficulty in accepting complexity. The emphasis on superficial responses, especially popular in the US, but not only here.

4. April 2006

Strangely, 'identity' is the space sometimes allotted to 'her', here in the US. The inadequacy of this category propelled 'her' to leave the US, her country of designated origin, many years before. Even with the passage of years and so many works of 'hers' made about 'import/export' and translation and transnational existence, writings about 'negotiations in contact zones', the prevalence in the US for this category as a means for labelling, then

mistaking that labelling as knowledge, and then dismissing any further obligation for more profound investigation, is not uncommon. Identity. It is an odd designation. An empty signifier. In the US 'she' feels compelled to read more of the late science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler, who in her *Xenogenesis Trilogy* (xenogenesis defined as 'the birth of something new - and foreign') far exceeds anything known as 'identity', or even human categories.

'She' left the country to find a space to create beyond rigid identity definitions.

When an exhibition historicising the art milieu in Cologne during the 1990s ; in which 'she' had been an active participant and to which 'she'd' steadily contributed ; came to the US, her contribution, beyond being a marker of identity, was erased. To her surprise, prevalent historical data, of the kind usually used to research a past time, was ignored by the US curator. 'She'd' heard the composer-musician and computer/installation artist George Lewis make a similar claim regarding the lack of acknowledgment of his participation with IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique) in the 1970s. No space seems possible to be assigned for 'her', beyond that one, in the current rush to write histories of the past decade, the *fin de siècle*. Many of the valiant witnesses from those times are dead. 'She' is left to make her own claims. This is why 'she' continues to endorse and rely on archives and the many documents they house. And indices of oblivion.

5. April 2006

The challenges encountered when attempting to both inhabit and to shift representation^a This creates forms of turbulence for the author, for example, in terms of where the words can be encountered, read or heard, and the force with which territories are protected and words censored.

Describe why it's necessary, in her case, to live in several places, even if she once thought she'd like only to continue to live in New York. That the attempt and effort to continue working and being connected to sources that provide intellectual, spiritual and emotional sustenance, as well as which relate to her deep history and genealogy, are all a part of these movements and relocations, as well as attempted inhabitations. The wish to inhabit in a way one chooses. That which can encompass the breadth of living, rather than a flattened stereotype or shallow half-life.

6. April 2006

But what is the relationship between these wishes and efforts to what can be described as turbulence?

turbulence: n. the quality or state of being turbulent.
turbulent: adj. 1. Causing violence or disturbance.
 2. Marked by agitation or tumult; tempestuous.



Below the apparently calm veneer: tensions and tempests. The struggle to claim more than limited access. Why is the access limited? Based on what criteria, and decided upon by whom? The contestation for representation and rights continues to be turbulent. Again, this relates to who is narrating history and how it is being done. Who is narrating the present and how is it being described? Again and again the question arises: why is this included and that excluded?

The continual and driving question for me: what else could be possible?

Think about forms of dispossession and violence ; physical, intellectual, historical.

Think about the relativity of privilege. There are serious reckonings yet to be made in what I'd describe as cultures of avoidance such as the US, in which the history and cultural forms of the country are based on suppressing the violence committed to found the nation. The avoidance to which I allude is the avoidance of coming to terms with historical acts that are repressed, rather than acknowledging these to be part of a contiguous history. What would it mean to acknowledge the violent ancestral acts that continue in altered and cruel forms today? Instead, what is attempted in cultures of avoidance is to live amidst a policed 'calm', based upon a deluded sense of entitlement and invincibility. In this consumption-laden and fear-saturated atmosphere, the fear

of punishment from those who've been lied to, robbed and abused, is a prevalent element and resides just under the surface of many encounters, suppressed and avoided. How to begin to describe the gross limitations of what I've encountered in the public and private cultural spheres that are affected by these forms of avoidance? I've observed attempts to exorcise critical, political and historical perspectives, and observed what is presented in their place as 'critical', 'political' and 'historical', to a broader public.

What could it mean to seriously engage with living in the world amidst the varieties of turbulence? Or amidst the varieties of experience possible, but without threatening or killing anyone? Examine the energy that turbulence requires. How to shift to a different way of being? The desire to shift would be necessary; I'm not convinced that many share this desire, as there are so many conflicting desires.

A drop of water in an ocean. In Paris I'll present films I've made that refer to turbulence: *Elsewhere? Here* and *Climates and Paradoxes*.

The question remains: What can each of us do?

7. April 2006

I'm glad the 'art world' is not the only subculture in which I've been interested. It's odd, but gradually in New York I've found less and less that interests me. New York is a magnet for many people from around the world, yet the conditions for living seem to dominate people's lives to such a great extent that other modes of engagement, that could be more interesting than drinking and going to art openings, seem less possible. Or maybe it is because I've experienced other ways of living and being in which time wasn't primarily devoted to working, fighting bad housing conditions, struggling for funding, etc.; these other ways allow me to think of better ways to live.



Humans. I saw the movie *4*, a first feature by Ilya Khrzhanovsky and directed from a script by Russian avant-garde novelist Vladimir Sorokin, last night. A view from contemporary Russia.

8. April 2006

Thinking and producing in turbulent times. F.A.M. (Free Agent Media, my dream label and production company), artist, media practitioner, writer, filmmaker, educator, space creator and enabler, activist, citizen. How to apply these terms now? Waking words. Sunrise in San Francisco.

Thinking and producing and living amidst many dislocations and forms of violence in economically privileged places, where tenuous relations to wealth and access exist. The components of that create the semblance of 'the good life'. The surface view. The supporting structures and genealogies differ. An immigrant protest and school boycott are scheduled for 1 May. Urban mirages: California and New York provide case studies.

9. April 2006

To create a place to return to, again and again, not only as a refuge, but as a place to receive sustenance that can renew one's motivation to continue to engage with life and the world, both internal and external worlds, both inner and public life. It continues to amaze me that the work of scholar and public intellectual Cornel West is not cited more often in broader contexts of intellectual discourse, beyond topical media debates. He definitely provides an interesting model of how to cope and live amidst the complexities of life today. In *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989), as well as in *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (2004), West provides a searing analysis of intellectual histories as they've been constructed in the US and that can be traced from an Emersonian genealogy. For example, West's statement:

American pragmatism emerges with profound insights and myopic blindnesses, enabling strengths and debilitating weaknesses, all resulting from distinctive features of American civilisation: its revolutionary beginning combined with an entrenched business-dominated status quo; its hybrid culture in combination with a collective self-definition as homogenously Anglo-American; its obsession with mobility, contingency, and pecuniary liquidity combined with a deep moralistic impulse; its impatience with theories and philosophies alongside ingenious technological innovation, political strategies of compromise, and personal devices for comfort and convenience. This hotel civilisation (to use Henry James' apt phrase), with its fusion of the uncertainty of the capitalist market with the quest for security of the home, yielded an indigenous mode of thought that subordinates knowledge to power, tradition to invention, instruction to provocation, community to personality, and immediate problems to utopian possibilities...¹

The fundamental argument of this book is that the evasion of epistemology-centred philosophy ; from Emerson to Rorty ; results in a conception of philosophy as a form of cultural criticism in which the meaning of America is put forward by intellectuals in response to distinct social and cultural crises. In this sense, American pragmatism is less a philosophical tradition putting forward solutions to perennial problems in the Western conversation initiated by Plato, and more a continuous cultural commentary or set of interpretations that attempt to explain America to itself at a particular historical moment.

West's writings have been helping me to think about 'home' and its complexities, as well as what I've sought beyond.

10. April 2006

Mobility?

What informs my point of view? List different contexts and experiences that have had an effect. I'm thinking again of how to describe the position from which I speak about turbulence.

Having choices? This is a big question. A student at the Whitney Museum independent study programme asked me whether the movements I've made to inhabit different places came from privilege or necessity, or both. I answered that necessity loomed large, if one considers a quest for freedom of thought and for freedom to create, as important possibilities that everyone should have; as these were also linked to my livelihood, it seemed necessary to move to fulfil these quests. Everyone can ask themselves these questions in relation to their own lives: Have you remained in the place you were born? Could you have stayed? Why did you leave? How were you able to leave? Will you return? What enables you to live, wherever you are?



Contested claims:

Land claims? Language claims? Citizenship claims?

Sociologist Saskia Sassen writes of new claims:

If place, that is, a certain type of place, is central in the global economy, we can posit a transnational economic and political opening in the formation of new claims and hence in the constitution of entitlements, notably rights to place, and more radically, in the constitution of 'citizenship'. The city has indeed emerged as a site for new claims: by global capital which uses the city as an 'organisational commodity', but also by disadvantaged sectors of the urban population, which in large cities are frequently as internationalised a presence as is capital. The denationalising of urban space and the formation of new claims by transnational actors and involving contestation, raise the question ; whose city is it? ^a

^aThe space constituted by the global grid of cities, a space with new economic and political potentialities, is perhaps one of the most strategic spaces for the formation of transnational identities and communities. This is a space that is both place-centred in that it is embedded in particular and strategic locations; and it is trans-territorial because it connects sites that are not geographically proximate yet are intensely connected to each other... [I]t is not only the transmigration of capital that takes place in this global grid, but also that of people, both rich (i.e., the new transnational professional workforce) and poor (i.e., most migrant workers) and it is a space for the transmigration of cultural forms, for the reterritorialisation of 'local' subcultures. An important question is whether it is also a space for a new politics, one going beyond the politics of culture and identity, though at least partly likely to be embedded in it.²

Place and Turbulence: Notes for Further Investigation and Rumination from A to T

A. Place: What Places Can We Inhabit and Act In?

- B.** Tenuous Residency, Stranger Status Worldwide
- C.** Place, Claims, Contentions, Networks
- D.** Where Do You Belong?
- E.** "I Am Here".
- F.** Revisiting Globalisation and Its Discontents
- G.** Encountering Cities without Citizens
- H.** Musing over *The Manifesta Decade*
- I.** Since Negotiations in the Contact Zone
- J.** 'Between and Including' as a Description of Ongoing Conditions
- K.** Le Corbusier's Stake, or The Dream of Unity in Modern Urbanism and the Blindness to Complicity in the Obliteration of Specific Histories or Other Desires via a Totalising View
- L.** Learning via Buildings (When They're Proposed, When They're Built, after They've Been Built, as They've Been Abandoned, as They Decay, as They're Refurbished)
Case Study: *Unité l'Habitacion*
Case Study: Einstein's summer house in Caputh
- M.** Practiced Places and Buried Histories
- N.** Temporal Dimensions
 - Inhabitation
 - Removal and Loss
 - Selected Life Indexes: Time Streams and Layered Remnants
(How are the Indices Composed?)
- O.** Respecting Ghosts: Memorial as a Portable and Intangible State of Recognition: Memorial As a Consciousness Carried within Us That Reminds Us of an Ethical Dimension of Our Existence.
- P.** Strategic and Involuntary Absences

Q. The Continual Returns of What's Repressed, or Acknowledging Contiguity

R. In the Rough-and-Tumble World of Global Cultural Production^a

S. From the Frontlines (a Survivor of the 'Culture Wars')

T. To Linger and to Tell.³

NOTES

1. Cornel West. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, Madison), p. 5.
2. Saskia Sassen. *Globalisation and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (The New Press, 1998, New York), xx, xxxii.
3. After having written these 'Notes', I read "The Guano of History", an essay that resonated with much of what I'd been thinking. It appears in *Cities Without Citizens*, (eds.) Eduardo Cadava and Aaron Levy (Slough Foundation, 2003, Philadelphia), pp. 137-65. The different strands of Cadava's documentation and analysis are woven into a powerful reminder that "in order to speak in the name of freedom, in the name of justice, we must speak of the past we inherit and for which we remain answerable, we must speak of ghosts, of generations of ghosts; of those who are not presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born". He opens his essay with a quote that I wish to borrow as an ending, as it has many reverberations for our ongoing turbulent times. The quote, from a letter by the Black Panther Party's charismatic incarcerated leader George Jackson, begins Cadava's explications (which later become intertwined with an analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Fate" (1860), and also the circuitous history of Peruvian *guano* (a commodity used to fertilise soil, that the US was as desperate for in the 19th century as it is now desperate for oil).

"My recall is nearly perfect, time has faded nothing", Jackson wrote on 4 April 1970. "I recall the very first kidnap. I've lived through the passage, died on the passage, lain in the unmarked, shallow graves of the millions who fertilised the Amerikan soil with their corpses; cotton and corn growing out of my chest, 'unto the third and fourth generation', the tenth, the hundredth". See George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Lawrence Hill Books, 1994, Chicago), pp. 233-34.

Notes from New York, July 2005

MOLLY NESBIT

Around 1844, Bronson Alcott helped Henry David Thoreau get the roof on his cabin at Walden Pond, just outside Boston. After they had finished, Thoreau wrote of him:

I think that he should keep an inn, a caravansery, on the world's highway, where the thinkers of all nations might put up, and on his sign should be written^a Enter all ye that have leisure and a quiet mind, who earnestly and without anxiety seek the right road . A thought floats as serenely and as much at home in his mind as a duck pluming herself on a far inland lake^a Ah, such discourse as we had ; hermit and philosopher^a It expanded and cracked my little house.¹

Thoreau went on to write his essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" just before the revolutions of 1848. This was the essay that impressed Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and many more advocates of nonviolent politics. Remember the opening lines?

I heartily accept the motto, 'That Government is best which governs least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe ; 'That government is best which governs not at all' ; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many

and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.

This American government ; what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavouring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend it to his will. It is a sort of wooden gun to the people themselves; and, if ever they should use it in earnest as a real one against each other, it will surely split. But it is not the less necessary for this; for the people must have some complicated machinery or other, and hear its din, to satisfy that idea of government which they have. Governments show thus how successfully men can be imposed on, even impose on themselves, for their own advantage. It is excellent, we must all allow; yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. It does not keep the country free. It does not settle the West. It does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. For government is an expedient by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone; and, as has been said, when it is most expedient, the governed are most let alone by it. Trade and commerce, if they were not made of India rubber, would never manage to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually putting in their way; and, if one were to judge these men wholly by the effects of their actions, and not partly by their intentions, they would deserve to be classed and punished with those mischievous persons who put obstructions on the railroads.

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.



For the first-rate artist, there is a moment when he's really getting revved up, and the time just flows into him. It only happens once. It happens without his awareness at all. He planned nothing. He was just going ahead doing this next thing^{f2}, Mike Nichols observed, sounding like a latter-day Hegel, writing about Tony Kushner. The time is history. It cracks our little houses open.



Periodically, while writing about something else, American writers stop to open the door for air. Two did so this past year, as they mulled over the words coming from the government, specifically, those of an advisor to the President of the United States. The advisor had told Ron Suskind, a reporter, that he and other people like him lived "in what we call the reality-based community", which the advisor defined as those believing "that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality". The advisor cut the idea down. "That's not the way the world really works any more. We're an empire nowf, he declared, "and when we act, we create our own realityf.

Anthony Grafton dropped these words abruptly into the essay he was writing on the work of Sir Isaac Newton. This gave them even darker purpose. "We Americansf, Grafton had just explained to the reader, "trace our origins, spiritual and intellectual, largely to the heralds of the Newtonian movement: writers and doers like Benjamin Franklin. The creators of the United States couched their arguments for its independence and their visions of its constitution in the Newtonian language of reason, nature's laws, and factual evidence. Nowadays, powerful leaders around the world defy these forms of intellectual self-disciplinef³. In other words, nowadays an applecart spills over the Enlightenment and the world as a whole. What once could only have been satire, or farce, is now policy. In the case of the United States, one could say that this policy flaunts its ideology to such a degree that it reveals itself to be smokescreen, or plain old smoke.

Smoke signals fire. The house could be burning down. When Mark Danner looked out to the assembly of literature students graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, he called upon them to look at the way the world was working and observed that we had lost the ability to act on the scandals in our time, like the illegal abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and to prosecute these scandals as crimes. The scandals too were actions. Not a matter of "a few bad apples" as the Bush administration has claimed, but a matter of policy decisions taken at the top. This, Danner told the students, had happened since they had arrived at school in the fall of 2001. The conclusion? In the space of those four years, "our government decided to change this country from a nation that officially does not torture to one, officially, that doesf⁴.

"America has no empire to extend or utopia to establishf, George W. Bush had declared in 2002 when announcing his policy of pre-emptive war to the graduating class of West Point cadets, and to the country.⁵ These words, of seeming no purpose, have had enormous, terrible, and concrete, consequences both inside and outside the United States. They are there to be read, if one is willing to read, to fish the smoke and subterfuge and catch the facts. Danner advised the students to do just that, to remain determined Empiricists of the Word.

He gave them more evidence, more words and an example. He quoted more of the presidential advisor's counsel to the reality-based reporter. "And while you're studying that reality ; judiciously, as you willf, the advisor had said, slick, too confident, lordly, "we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort outf. A prophecy or a problem? Danner spoke with martial art. He recited Czeslaw Milosz's

strange sad lyric, *A Song on the End of the World*, written in 1944 in Warsaw during the throes of another war. It had not become defenceless with time. In *Song*^a, an old man binds his tomatoes, others cannot see the end happening; but the man sees the end's absolute banality and equates it with life:

*On the day the world ends
A bee circles a clover,
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing
And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.*

*On the day the world ends
Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street
And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island.
The voice of a violin lasts in the air
And leads into a starry night.*

*And those who expected lightning and thunder
Are disappointed.
And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps
Do not believe it is happening now.
As long as the sun and the moon are above,
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,
As long as rosy infants are born
No one believes it is happening now.*

*Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,
Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:
There will be no other end of the world,
There will be no other end of the world.*

Apples and tomatoes too create the conditions that allow time to flow suddenly into a person. Remember Newton's gravity. Remember Milosz writing his song. Remember how history is actually made. Time flows through the facts in the poet's words too. Together an empiricist and a poet were raising the roof.

This text draws upon notes made in anticipation of the exhibition *Uncertain States of America: American Art in the Third Millenium*, curated by Daniel Birnbaum, Gunnar Kvaran and Hans Ulrich Obrist, at the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art in Oslo, 8 October - 12 December 2005.

NOTES

1. From Thoreau's original manuscript for *Walden*, as cited by Geraldine Brooks, "Orpheus at the Plough: Louisa May Alcott's Difficult Father". In *The New Yorker*, 10 January 2005, p. 64.
2. Quoted by John Lahr, "After Angels: Tony Kushner's Political Theatre". In *The New Yorker*, 3 January 2005, p. 48.
3. Anthony Grafton. "The Ways of Genius". In *The New York Review of Books*, 2 December 2004, p. 37. He is quoting from the report of Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt", *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 October 2004.
4. Mark Danner. "What Are You Going To Do With That?" In *The New York Review of Books*, 23 June 2005, pp. 52-56.
5. President George W. Bush. "Answering the Call of History". Address at the 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, 1 June 2002.
US Department of State: http://www.state.gov/images/i_spcr08.gif.

Cement and Speed

MICHAEL TAUSSIG

Upstate New York where I live near Rosendale in the summer, you find the remains of 19th-century stone kilns in which limestone was burned to a fine powder for cement. Abandoned limestone mines run for miles through the hills. Every so often you find a weathered blue sign by the road like this one:

DISCOVERY OF CEMENT

At Bruceville, Nathaniel
Bruce burned in a blacksmith's
forge some native rock and
discovered cement in 1818.

State Education
Department 1939

Actually, cement was "discovered" in many places and at different times in Europe and North America from the late 18th century onward. And it was not really discovered but rediscovered, because it was used in ancient Egypt as well as in ancient Greece and Rome. This repetition and the centuries of forgetting between its ancient and its modern discoveries seem more than fitting for such a material, mimetic in the following ways: (1) Its modern "discovery" mimes its ancient past; (2) the name given it around 1800 as "cement rock" reminds us today of the obvious yet forgotten wonder of synthetic materials that mimic natural ones; and (3) to be specific, the fact it can be moulded and shaped as liquid stone

allows it to mimic many forms ; as modernist architects such as Corbusier made into a virtual religion. One hundred years ago, this Rosendale cement found many buyers and was famous for its durability. Real rock, we could say. It took 30 days to harden, I am told, was the cement used to build the Brooklyn Bridge, and for a long time it was stipulated in New York State law that a certain percentage of cement used on state freeways had to come from Rosendale. Hard as stone, they said. But Portland cement, patented in 1824 in England and developed in the United States by mid-century, hardened in 30 hours. Not so hard, but it did the job and destroyed the market for the cement from around here. The cement industry disappeared, but the stones of the kilns remain like crumbling altars in the hardwood forests of ash and maple. There are myths as well. People around here say the White House in Washington stores its files in the unused mines that honeycomb the hills.

Cement is made by burning limestone in stone kilns. Andean Indians, however, put limestone in their mouth, not to make cement, but to add to the coca leaves they chew so as to more speedily release the effects for which cocaine is famous. In the mountain peaks above El Bordo in the Cordillera Central of Cauca, Colombia, sits the tiny village of Almaguer, whitewashed adobe huts running along a steep ridge under a blue-domed sky. It was one of the very first mining settlements in the New World, but nobody has mined there in a long time. Indian women sit on the ground there on market day in irregular rows in the midday sun. The sky is dazzling up there and the air bone dry. They are selling coca leaves carried over the hills in woven cloth bags that seem like they will last forever. Next to each bag are cakes of lime to chew along with the coca. Down in the valley, young men in civilian clothes with acne and long hair stop the bus with machine guns, looking for cocaine. They open up your 35-mm film canisters. It is 1976, long before the war started. I'd never even heard of cocaine outside of the dentist's office. When I got off the bus in El Bordo down in the valley on my way to Almaguer, a chubby young man asked me if I was CIA. What was I meant to say? Yes? No? Way up the mountain where the sky touches your face, a strangely dressed man kept following us on the mountain paths, always a few hundred feet behind on those winding trails. Something was brewing up there. But all you need is limestone, a.k.a cement. The coca is everywhere.

When the Colombian government, urged on by the United States in the 1980s, blocked the importation of the chemicals needed to process cocaine from coca, the chemists soon came up with a substitute. What do you think it was? Cement! Soon cement trucks were heaving their way across the mountains and down into the jungle. An army colonel said not so long ago there was enough cement carried into the Putumayo to pave that enormous province several times over. Since the army controls all the checkpoints, the colonel must know what he's talking about. Since the army controls all the checkpoints, you would think maybe they would have stopped all that cement. But who can argue against cement, the backbone of modernity?

Cement is intimately related to water. It needs water to harden. This seems counterintuitive. The 1st-century Roman architect and builder Vitruvius understood stone as composed of four elements: air, earth, fire, and water. As a builder, he wanted a substance like stone but malleable. When you stop to think about it, this is like something out of a fairy

tale: *like stone but malleable*. Smashing up limestone into small particles and mixing them with sand was not good enough, for there was neither unification nor hardening. That could only come with intense heat, which left the stone porous: "The water and air, therefore, which are in the substance of the stones, being thus discharged and expelled, and the latent heat only remaining, upon being replenished with water, which repels the fire, they recover their vigor and the water entering the vacuities occasions a fermentation; the substance of the lime is thus refrigerated and the superabundant heat ejected"¹. I quote at length because this is such a vivid example of the ancient four-element theory of being that preoccupied the pre-Socratic philosophers. It is vivid in that it makes stones seem alive and capable of amazing metamorphoses once they have been processed by man, pulverised to a powder and heated. You start with stone. You make a powder. And then in the process of building, you add water and end up with a new form of "stone" in accord with the shape desired. It sounds like magic but we call it technology.

In Guapí, on the coast, cement buildings stand out as signs of the modern and the good. What a contrast such buildings make with the older wooden houses! Cement comes on oceangoing boats from Buenaventura, while lumber comes from the trees upriver, although wood is becoming scarcer and certain types of hardwood, such as *chachajo*, are almost impossible to find along the mid- to lower reaches of the Río Timbiquí, for instance. The older wooden houses in Guapí and Santa Bárbara are often huge, a few almost the size of a city block, two tall stories in height. Inside, the houses are dark and musty. The floor creaks underfoot. The walls between bedrooms are opaque to head level and then become slats to assist the circulation of air, such that at night when a light is burning, striated rectangular shadows like a Piet Mondrian painting splay across the interior walls and ceilings and out onto the street. When you sleep, you hear the person in the next room sleeping, an occasional creak or a whimper. The staircases are the steepest I have encountered, steeper than the 17th-century houses in Amsterdam, for instance. Most wooden houses are badly in need of repair. Rarely are they painted. The colour is a patchwork quilt of greys and browns, of old and new planking wherever a new side has been built or a patch made. The planks are not tightly joined, one next to the other, like weather-boarding. Instead, their edges abut one another, leaving a slight gap. As you walk the street, it seems like the walls of the houses are passing you on either side as a moving series of verticals and horizontals, depending on how the planks have been nailed. Improvisation is ubiquitous, each wall a different mosaic. This suggests flexibility, which is indeed true, as put to the test by earthquakes, which frequent the coast and are more destructive of cement buildings.² The downside with wood is fire, which swept through Guapí in 1933 and 1967, burning much of the town to the ground, and devastating fires like this have occurred in all the towns of the coast.³ But cement is fire resistant and lasts far longer than wood. In 1955 a new batch of Catholic priests trained local men in reinforced concrete construction and built a huge Gothic church with flying buttresses and a lacelike cement brick superstructure for ventilation. Like all cement buildings here, it has become mottled with fungus so it seems even more worn down by the tropics than the older wooden buildings.

After the church was built, the cement workers went out to sea in their pea-green boats where they built the prison on the island of Gorgona. Then they went back to Guapí and built the Banco de la República.

the church

the prison

the bank

Every so often in Guapí, I come across an elaborately carved wooden bedstead ; made by the prisoners in Gorgona years ago. This is no bed for mortals but for gods. The carving craves wood, eats wood, makes love with the woodenness of wood till it fuses with it and becomes one with the wood it chisels at and deflects into flower petals and whales by whose side scamper dolphins across ocean waves lit up by flights of angels. This is the ancient art of mimesis, with a vengeance, wood on the move, woody metamorphoses speaking poetry as the prisoner with all the pressed-in time in the world eases his chisel softly round the bends. In my friend's cement house with its grand echoes and hard tiled floor, her bed is the one *objet d'art* of which the house can boast. When you open the bedroom door, the bed radiates, like lifting the lid of a pirate's treasure chest.

This cement that is so expensive and comes from so far away, from the interior and sometimes from neighbouring countries, is also poured out in immense quantities for landing stages and steps for canoes and larger boats. You only have to see how treacherous a muddy bank becomes after a few weeks of use to appreciate solid cement underfoot. Slimy black river mud and mottled cement unite in one happy interface. One descends from concrete to mud and one ascends from mud to concrete as part of one's amphibious being.

Even though there are hens here, eggs come from the interior of the country, like cement. The hens lay only if fed corn, and that's not easy to come by. On the cement landing steps at Santa Bárbara, I see black hens in crates unloaded from Buenaventura. And here I am in the bosom of nature, together with imported hens.

It will take 400 bags of cement, each weighing 100 pounds, to replace the gravel steps on either side of the church on the hill at Santa Maria. One dugout canoe poled upstream by two men can carry ten bags from Santa Bárbara and takes two days of Herculean labour.

Speed: Talking with kids at Guapí, I was amused to realise the way they referred to motorised river craft was by a number ; *nueve nueve, quince, veinte y cinco, setenta y cinco* ; meaning the horsepower of the outboard motor hitched to the stern. There are many canoes still with the beautiful pointed ends fore and aft, but the squat-ended, high-sided dugout with the motor screwed astern is now a major feature on the rivers, despite the fabulous expense of the motors and gasoline, which, like cement and black hens, come from the interior.

At the wharf at Santa Bárbara, launches come in at great speed. Their bows point way up in the sky. The stern is sunk deep in the water. The *motorista* cuts the motor and puts

the boat in a tight curve as it settles into the water and coasts to the cement steps. Often the boat carries a government employee or a small group of such. The ones from the interior assume a look of superiority that belies their trepidation as regards the new world enclosing them, as the launch loses speed and nature reasserts itself in a tepid, rocking motion and the clammy heat gels. With its supernaturally endowed speed across the surface of the water, this boat is their sign of power, their privilege, and their escape from all that now threatens. The motors and their speed seem to be saying, "Look! Out there mud and mangroves, mosquitoes, rain, and unrelenting poverty, a forlorn world buried in amphibious horror! But with me and my birdlike speed skimming the waters, you are not only removed from the raw nastiness of nature. You turn it into a spectacle like the view from a train window. What does place mean now? Place has become an unravelling ribbon of time, and the ribbon is yours to put in your pocket as a trophy".

But the motors lie. The godlike promise of speed's glory is torture. The human body disintegrates into a shuddering mess, and the rain darts like hot needles into your eyes so you are forced to look down at your feet all the time. Passengers become inert matter, turned inward into their agony, waiting with animal-like patience for the journey to end. Your actual physical body that you thought you knew so well becomes a dumb insensate part of the surge of grey river water. Yes, the motors lie. Far from being removed from the raw nastiness, far from having nature as spectacle, you enter deep into the shuddering resistance of nature. Otherwise, life is slow. In fact, it's stopped. Maybe you could even say life here is going backward. Think, therefore, what it must be like, to hurtle through the elements like this, defying basic laws of physics and God. Prometheus unchained. Then the motor cuts and it's all over. The boat sinks down with a sigh. You hear the sound of the river once again. You stagger up the steps in the sun's steamy glare, a few greetings, and it all comes to a standstill. The waiting that is life begins once more. A meal of rice and warmed-up tinned tuna, if you're lucky, and a night of Peruvian TV adulating the president, the white race, and explosively fragmented ads for beer in the English language. Then the generator cuts out at 10.30. No postal service. No telephone service since many months, and even when there is one, there is none, it being so inefficient.

But speed. Yes! That we do have. It's addictive, the poetry of the gods, bow lifting, the spray cascading in the fan-shaped wake, wreaking havoc on lesser vessels, the noise preventing all speech, the thudding on the hull as we skip from wave to shuddering wave out in the open estuary. All this is new. And escalating. Like the arms' race or the 20% inflation the country's suffered under for as long as I can remember ; inflation being the central bank's way of raising taxes in a country where the rich are untaxable (but not unkidnappable). No sooner have we gotten used to the 9.9, than it's the 15 horsepower, and after that the 30, and so on it goes now to 200 horsepower, and instead of just one huge motor, you install two! When I first travelled from Guapí to Santa Bárbara in 1971, and felt very lucky to arrive alive, the trip took the best part of a day with a 15-horsepower motor. Now in the store owner's double-engined open boat carrying twelve passengers, all without life jackets, it can be done in one hour! This must be the closest thing to flying possible, while still technically in the water.

Farther north, the Embera Indians of the Chocó and southern Panamá have stories of phantom *gringo* boats with zombie crews, creatures of diabolic realms that spell great danger. Shamans make models of such boats to use in curing séances. The model works by sympathetic magic. In copying the phantom boat, you get its mysterious power. Now with the benefit of our 200-horsepower engines, we too have become zombies stock-still in our faster-than-light phantom *gringo* boat.

As we head out of the estuary, the hull thumps on the waves. The boat shudders with each concussion. Sometimes we surf on the waves as we round the point near the reef. Big-beaked birds fly in formation low over the sea under the canopy of a grey sky. We are on parallel tracks for a while, the birds and us. We move in a straight line, but the horizon has a different trajectory. It circles us, leaving the coast a tiny smudge without the slightest distinguishing feature. We are no less empty than the emptiness we smash through.

Why the speed? Is it required for some practical reason, or is it for the thrill, which turns out to be an ordeal, the thrill of being modern as well as the thrill of speed itself? Once you've tried to sort through this, you'll find you're asking a quite different question. Especially on the coast, where life is so slow. Speed takes you to the very opposite of speed. It takes you to the river's own power, to two women in white dresses standing precariously balanced, their bodies tensed and slightly bent, poling downstream a dugout canoe filled with green plantains like giant fingers beautifully bunched amidships, manoeuvring their slender vessel through rapids. At times the canoe moves like a shot from a gun. One slip and it's all over. Other times it seems suspended as on a glass surface. Like insects, its long poles scratch the surface, and the whole scene seems to move with them and not just the canoe. The river slips past and takes slices of the world with it. A movie screen. Or it may be way out in the calm of the estuary, paddles slowly dipping as if there's all day and tomorrow too, slipping across the surface of deep muddy waters.

But the vessel was once even stiller and slower, standing upright in the forest around Santa María where the best and last trees for canoes exist. It was cut down by hand, hollowed out and roughly shaped by axe in the forest where it lay, then dragged to the village. Enter the *labrador*. The woodman. There are around 15 in Santa María. For this mining town is also a world of wood. Even the basic tool of mining is made of wood: the *batea* in which Lilia's newborn now lies, just the eyes peering out of swaddling clothes. The wood for the *batea* comes from what is left over in the making of a canoe, and *bateas* come in two sizes. The larger is for panning gold. The smaller, more ellipsoid but still basically a saucer of wood, is used as a baby's cradle. So:

trees
 canoes
 gold
 child
 a circle or an ellipse

The *labrador* uses nothing but an axe, a machete, and two kinds of small planes, one for flat surfaces and one for the interior curves. Nearly all craft on the coast have been made this way, tree trunks become boats, every tiny angle and indentation bearing the mark of the hand of its maker. Vicente Angulo looks at me young and strong as he puts the finishing touches with nothing more than a machete to a beautiful paddle seven feet long, made of one of the hardest woods, *chachajo*, his face in a grimace, belied by an expansive smile. "You've no idea how much work it is with an axe. How it gets to you, aching deep in your body. How much we'd give for a chain saw". But there is only one power saw in the village. The man who owns and lives off it is very thin, very nice, has a crumpled leg, and his tumbledown little house on stilts is stuck way out beyond the tail end of the village. In fact, he is not from the village. He comes from way downriver. How much *chachajo* or *palo de mulato* for canoes would there be left if everyone here had a chain saw?

I met a man who owned a sawmill. It was way downriver in the estuary where the bigger boats dock against piles of dark weathered lumber, one plank slipped flat on top of the next so as to form an improvised wharf from a mountain of rotting wood. He was a big man with a generous nature who had long ago given up physical labour. His wife and children lived in Cali, and he stayed most of the time with his mother, who lived on the river in an empty two-story wooden house with a steep staircase and creaky interiors. For him, the coast was memories and a place to exploit. His existence here was an enforced one, sweetened, no doubt, by the fact he had one of the better-paying "jobs" with the municipal administration as well. What surprised me was that while he could identify cut lumber easily, he could not identify the living trees from which the lumber came.

Men paddle standing up with those long paddles like Vicente Angula was making. Women's paddles are half as long, and they paddle with long, slow, elegant strokes, sitting on tiny wooden seats with tiny backrests. Sometimes you see them paddling with a baby at the breast.

There would be no 200-horsepower motors without cocaine, and cocaine is what allows cement to rise in the streets of the coastal town like dream castles. I cannot think of anywhere else in the world ; or at least in my world ; where speed can actually be experienced like this: *fulsomely*. It is common enough to hear of speed in relation to electronic mail and transfers of cash, air travel, and fax machines. Yet such speed remains at a stage of remove. The human body remains encased in a standard environment as in a capsule. Not so, however, on the water with two giant Yamaha outboards at full throttle.

A Lesson in Natural History: It was only on the coast that I became aware of the change in time. The incoming President of the Republic, a man named César Gaviria, had at one shot introduced neo-liberal economic policy and US-inspired daylight savings time to relieve pressure on the nation's electricity supply, and somehow, with the defeat of Marxism and the triumph of free-marketeering dogma, this all seemed tied into the arrival of the gold-digging Russians. As the machinery clambering up the Río Timbiquí indicated, it was the time of the "economic opening", President Gaviria's *apertura económica*. So, we ask, was this bold attempt to change the time the last flicker of the authoritarian state surrendering

its power to the market? Or, better still, did it not illustrate the thesis that the free market is only free to the extent that the state legislates basic categories of experience, including the Kantian ones of space, cause, and time itself?

The radio, TV, banks, government offices, and commercial airlines fell into line. But on the coast, most people, including the church in Guapí and the schools there, followed the old hour so that there were two times ticking away an hour apart and even more opportunity for creative games with time. And when people tried to confirm which time was meant, they would ask, "*Hora Gaviria* (Gavirian time)?" ; testimony to a love of confusion no less than admiration for the man who had tried to change time. For even behind the anonymity of the clock face and its immaculate working lurks the invisible hand of a person, but it needs a joke to reveal its unconscious presence. To cap it off, there was a rumour along the river that Gaviria himself was a partner in the Russian mine and had visited there at least once by helicopter.

Changing the clock for daylight savings time is routine in many First World countries. It means adjusting the workday more finely to the daylight hours, in other words, more efficiently exploiting the energy of the sun so as to more efficiently exploit the energy of people. On the coast this change created two clocks that confused time itself, locked into the heady drama of the cosmic struggle between a mere man and the sun itself, or at least between the modern state and our ancient friend, the sun. What is at stake in this drama is the domination of nature, including man's inner nature, the sense of time in relation to the dawn's spreading light. "The sun gives without receiving", says Bataille.⁴ Speed, gold, and cocaine all partake of that logic, that love of giving over and over again without restraint. But only divers do it right. Blood pours from their noses. Their life is on the line. The risks are huge. The rewards might be huge too. Their hands become their eyes as they pull the sun down through the water into the opaque green murk at the bottom of the river and so transform it into gold.

This text is reprinted by permission from Michael Taussig's *My Cocaine Museum* (The University of Chicago Press, 2004, Chicago/London).

NOTES

1. Stephen Sass. *The Substance of Civilisation: Materials and Human History from the Stone Age to the Age of Silicon* (Arcade, 1988, New York), p. 130; R.H. Bogue, *The Chemistry of Portland Cement* (Reinhold, 1955, New York), p. 5.
2. Gustavo Wilches-Chaux, H. Meyer and A. Velásquez. "La Costa Brava". In (ed.) Pablo Leyva Franco, *Colombia Pacifico*, 2 vols. (FEN, 1993, Bogotá), Vol. 2, p. 491.
3. Ibid.
4. Georges Bataille. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Vol. 1: Consumption*. Transl. Robert Hurley (Zone Books, 1988, New York), p. 28.

Mapping the Invisible: Notes on the Reason of Conspiracy Theories

CÉDRIC VINCENT

"there is no such thing as a coincidence^a Nothing happens in this universe^a unless entity wills it to happen".

– William S. Burroughs

In July 1997, the term "conspiracy theory" was included for the first time in the pages of the supplement to the prestigious *Oxford English Dictionary*. The appearance of this entry recognises and validates the popularity that conspiracy theories have enjoyed since the end of the Cold War. They seem, indeed, to have become the one pre-eminent mode by which the unfolding of contemporary events are read.¹ The impression that they are proliferating can be explained by the fact that more and more people have the qualities and the resources needed to track down conspiracies and make them public. The internet plays a fundamental role in this. The websites www.parascope.com, www.conspire.com and www.conspiracy.net, or to a lesser extent, www.disinfo.com, describe scenarios for various small and large conspiracies, from Diana's accident orchestrated by the British Secret Services to the Bush family's connections with Osama bin Laden.² The imprint of terrorist activity after 11 September 2001 has further intensified paranoid thinking by reifying the rhetoric of suspicion.³ After all, terrorists are the emblematic figures of conspiracies.⁴

Conspiracy theories, intrigues and other *théories du complot* appear when a dramatic event takes place, and with the feeling that official explanations understate its implications and tone down its significance. Conspiracies theories - the apprehension of the conspiracy by those not involved in it ; focus on tangible facts, those that official accounts would ignore. In other words, a conspiracy theory begins when someone notices that the

explanations do not match the facts. The French journalist/political activist Thierry Meyssan's bestseller, *L'Effroyable Imposture*, is a perfect illustration of this reasoning.⁵ Meyssan's objective is to reveal the inside story of the September 11 attacks, making it out to be a secret scheme hatched by some elements of the United States government. By comparing many official photographs of the Pentagon, which was ripped apart by a hijacked plane crashing into it, he is amazed that "the lawn in the foreground is not spoiled at all, and the façade is only damaged to a width of 19 metres when the wingspan of the plane is 38 metres ; which would imply therefore that the wings and the rest of the cabin remained outside . But they cannot be seen on the photographs taken a few moments after the accident, nor is there any trace on the lawn, nor of debris of the fuselage. The Pentagon has even accepted that there wasn't any piece outside the building". He therefore deduces that it was impossible for a plane to have crashed at this place!

Such rationale continues to impress by its vision of causality, its effort to track down every possible relevant detail where there is no accident; everything is connected, intended and meaningful. This is why conspiracy theorists are often accused of connecting too many threads, of fighting with fictive enemies and ending up with simplifications - of aligning themselves therefore with rumour rather than information. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics", an essay by the historian Richard Hofstadter that was published during the McCarthy period at the beginning of the Cold War, still gives a sense of the tone of studies of this phenomenon. He affirms that conspiracy theories are collective "paranoid delusions"⁶. The majority of the literature on the subject adopts his line of thinking, with its pejorative and exotic approach to conspiracy theories, and a focus on fundamentalism, secret societies, cult religions or extremist groups. Since Hofstadter, the most common strategy of debunking conspiracy theory has been to marginalise the purveyors of conspiracy theory as pathological. It established the idea that paranoiac social thought is based on ironic, cynical and transgressive world views, constructed from partial truths that were a grotesque version of critical theory's own fascination.⁷ The leading Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson participated indirectly in this kind of rhetoric when he asserted that conspiracy theories were regressive, "debased", a "degraded attempt to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system", and a "poor person's mapping of the postmodern age"⁸.

Conspiracy theories have, however, become so deeply entrenched in the political imagination that they cover every point of the political spectrum. They fashion right-wing and left-wing with the same vigour. Conspiratorial explanations have become a central feature of political discourse, a way of understanding power that appeals to both marginalised groups and the power elite. In a way, it does not matter if conspiracy theories are true or are fantasy; what is more important here is whether, through these, people achieve consciousness of their situation.

The "contemporary paranoid style", described by the anthropologist George Marcus to go beyond Hofstadter's presuppositions of irrationality, leads one to considerably review the approach to the issue.⁹ Groups of people might share paranoiac views, but their views

exist within reasonable structures of explanations. For Marcus, there are two contextual frameworks to this issue:

1) The Cold War legacy. The Cold War is defined as a massive project of paranoid social thoughts and actions which have impregnated every dimension of mainstream culture ; right up to the conceptual rhetoric and frameworks by social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, whose conceptual frame is immersed in an idea of class conspiracy and used to interpret the hierarchy of taste in Western societies. Theorists of schizophrenia, such as Ronald Laing, assert that the cause of schizophrenia can be a permanent conspiracy perpetrated by the family against the child. As for the cultural critic Jamer Hunt, he goes on to skilfully propose the hypothesis that the paranoid speculation is at the heart of every theory.¹⁰

2) A crisis of representation, and meta-narratives as a mode of explaining the world. It is not strange if the proliferation of conspiracy narratives arises in an age supposedly marked by the disappearance of grand explanatory schemes.

For those who adopt this line, "there is truth to be found in suspicions of power ; that, in the cases they consider, power does, without a doubt, conspire and that, consequently, the suspicious may be 'paranoid within reason'"¹¹. They tend to argue that attempts to disprove conspiracy theories are just efforts to impose dominant ideological views on those who are "backward", "irrational" or "superstitious". The case of dietrology is interesting here. Dietrology is the science or the search for what is hidden behind (*dietro*) an event. The term was coined in the troubled Italy of the 1970s and '80s. It was used ironically, notably by the right-wing press, to ridicule an excessive tendency to blame secret forces close to the government for all inexplicable murders, kidnappings, bombings or accidents taking place during this period. But the inseparable irony of the word itself has often been used against its users, when it became clear that dietrological theses pertaining to some of these incidents were not so far from the truth. In the same way, the anthropologist Misty Bastian, who studies the media narratives of an elite murder ring in Nigeria, shows that the emergence of conspiracy theories in Nigeria to describe an environment of anxiousness, mistrust and rumours towards the government does not give any place to irrationality.¹² Conspiracy theory cannot simply be pathologised with a sweeping gesture. This is not to say we must open our arms to all conspiracy theory. It is to assert that diagnoses of political paranoia are themselves political statements.

Conspiracy is conventionally understood as being a clandestine project directed towards getting an outcome. It plays on the secret and the invisible. A 'good' conspiracy would be one that is undetectable, providing no clues of its existence. Conspiracy theorists, consequently, have the task of exposing ; making visible ; the clandestine causative agent. This desire to establish connections and to dramatise intrigues indicates the utility of conspiracy as a refuge for imagination, in which explanations can be constructed outside of officially sanctioned information. In fact, it would seem that the conspiracy theories, far from being simplifying and limiting, make the world more complex by focusing on hidden and contradictory logics, and by proposing alternative means for understanding and

grasping the world. In addition, it is a world where international elites encourage pluralist democracy and market transparency, and where American foreign policy continues to be led through opaque processes which bear the marks of conspiracy^a

Conspiracy and Globalisation

For more than a decade, there has been a growing chorus celebrating what has generally been understood as the start of a new epoch, the area of globalisation, of information society for others, of millennial capitalism for yet others, even empire for a few. A basic, often-implicit assumption is that globalisation is an evolutionary process that is today unifying the world, a phenomenon that has never before occurred in world history. As a process, it consists in the transnationalisation of the flux of capital, people, technologies, information and the like, an increase in the density of interaction between different parts of the world. This is one of the most generally conceded aspects of the phenomenon.¹³

Globalisation is accepted more than ever because of the possibility of being represented by a multiplicity of agents, whatever their degree of involvement in the movements under way. The opposition between a small number of exploiters becoming eternally richer, and a majority of exploited becoming always more dispossessed, dominates this imagination ; even if it does not correspond to the economic reality. The majority of the inhabitants of the periphery feels excluded from a process which overturns customs and ways of living and dying, of hoping and despairing, without bringing to it the prosperity promised by governments or international organisations. Mistrust vis-à-vis the world system, coupled with suspicion towards nation-states, stirs up fear and paranoiac feeling in such a way that many see in these changes or in their own immobility the work of ill-intentioned agents or the activity of the richest and the most powerful - especially the work of Westerners or Americans. In this sense, it is not surprising that the political specialist Zaki Lâidi wonders if "globalisation is the latest Western plot".

It is important to emphasise that the much-vaunted newness assigned to the globalisation age resides less in its factual, or exceptional, nature, than in its assimilation into an unprecedented historical process translated by the category of globalisation. This is why social players make globalisation out to be responsible for the reorganisation of power and knowledge in the world, and it is why they also use it as a theoretical platform to grasp the metamorphoses taking place. From this arises also, without doubt, the success enjoyed by conspiracy theories that provide a trajectory and an explanation for globalisation. Conspiracy theories presume that events are caused by people acting, collaborating, organising, swindling, cheating and seeking power. They are not ready to pay as much attention to impersonal forces such as geopolitics, the market economy, globalisation, social evolution or what cyberpunks called "autonomous corporations". They remain radically empirical by looking for elements that give flesh to the logic of conspiracy.

Through political discourses and practices of certain states, international organisations or NGOs, globalisation acquires a manifest reality. The idea of intrigue informs its distinctive traits, its intensity and its long-distance effects. For it must be admitted that those who

adhere to the conspiracy idea have good reasons to do so, to be suspicious, in the face of such a hegemonic power on which they depend for survival. The practices of international firms or those active under the framework of geopolitical relations conform in their own way to this fatal reality. Manipulations engineered by industrial giants such as Shell or Union Carbide, for example, are well-known facts. In South Korea, the anthropologist Laurel Kendall has examined people from diverse social classes who interpreted the Asian financial crisis in 1998 through the prism of Shamanism in order to relieve their anxieties and to untangle the threads of the menace.¹⁴

In this sense, Fredric Jameson is right; conspiracy theories are a part of the response to impersonal forces and diffuse structures generated by contemporary societies (global flux, large organisations, bureaucracies, informational networks⁸).¹⁵ Those who resort to them identify in this way who does what and why they do it, for the strength of paranoid thought lies in its perfect coherence: it does not leave any space for error, failure or ambiguity. Conspiracy theories give meaning to occurrences, to equivocal or dramatic situations. They are attempts to find a narrative for the contradictions and transformations that are animating the world. This is most certainly a way to make them more intelligible by making it possible to reduce the tension arising out of the pressure exerted by reality. Narration of events and facts is the main form of legitimating knowledge in conspiracy theory. The idea of intrigue tends to become the pre-eminent "metadiscourse of modernity", a scheme capable of explaining complex social events, even the *lingua franca* to track the tensions of what George Bush baptised in 1991 as the "New World Order"¹⁶. One could almost call it a means to re-enchant the world, trying to conceptualise the relation between individuals and larger social bodies.

Occultism and Transparency

Transparency is one of the key words of the New World Order. It is an emergent norm for neoliberal democracy and economic policy. International firms, as much as the UN, extol transparency as an objective and a pre-condition for the right to economic assistance and for creating a favourable atmosphere for international investors. To anthropologists Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, "transparency is invoked by those who think of themselves as modern as they talk about their vision of a modern society"¹⁷. 'Transparency' has become a synonym of good governance, another way to celebrate the rationality of modern society.¹⁸ Of course, conspiracy theory ideas construct 'truths' that do not coincide with the 'truths' constructed by the discourse of transparency. Both are ideologically antagonistic formations. Conspiracy theories suggest that "there is more to what happens in the world than meets the eye ; that reality is anything but 'transparent'"¹⁹. Transparency politics have nourished a paranoid axiom: the more we are told that power is "transparent", the more we feel need to say that it is not!

In regimes of transparency, intrigue and paranoia constitute a predicament inherent to the institutional order, for the logic of bureaucratic rationality recommends secrecy. The objective purpose of rational bureaucracies requires a norm of conduct free from public

opinion, a norm where knowledge is kept secret. Secrecy is a necessary condition for maintaining the structure of domination over the outside, but it is also in conflict with democratic ideals of openness. The germs of certain forms of contemporary paranoia originate in this paradoxical situation. Cyberpunk as a genre described this kind of situation between information-rich corporations (those who know the secrets) and their servants and the underclass that exists outside corporate enclaves. In his paranoid stories, the proto-cyberpunk novelist Philip K. Dick described regularly a world where governments and large organisations are constructed in terms of conspiracy created by those who have knowledge in order to control an underclass.

It is ironic to think that the sociologist Anthony Giddens identified trust as one of the main constitutive characteristics of modernity ; trust in the operations of institutions whose operations we cannot directly control nor follow.²⁰ But modernity generates the same impenetrability of power that it claims to prevent. The belief that power is still conspiring even under a regime of electoral democracy may be expressed in Mozambique or in Indonesia in the form of references to the dark world of sorcery.²¹

Whereas officially appointed representatives of the New World Order proclaim their desire to base themselves on a universal discourse celebrating the transparency of power (through modernisation, economic liberalisation, the democratisation of political forms and information, the affirmation of human rights, the cleaning up of the black economy and the dismantling of mafia networks), local players looking for meanings apt for sociability harvest the ashes of events. They hope in this way to get close to the origin of those forces likely to redirect to their own advantage the flows of power that circulate in the world. Rather than resisting power, they seek to reveal and direct the hidden forces that are supposed to sustain their world, to explore the nuances of power, and to take advantage of this ambivalence. Because a large number of social players experience modernity as a blurring of landmarks, a contradictory process favouring both fluidity and fragmentation, local, regional and world powers seem to them inaccessible, impenetrable and, most of the time, ill-intentioned. From this arises the feeling of threat or danger. And despite the variety in beliefs and cosmologies, ordinary people and those who are dominated conspire to suspect the Others: those, one could say, who possess extraordinary powers, those who determine the fate of this world.

Postscript

This interest in conspiracy theories has not come about from reading William S. Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo, but from an interest in the activities of groups of artists and activists such as Bureau d'Etudes (<http://utangente.free.fr/>), The Speculative Archive (www.speculativearchive.org), Trevor Paglen (www.paglen.com) and Mark Lombardi (who was the first to establish the connections between the Bush family and Bin Laden). All of them share the desire to reveal the flip side of the playing cards of this New World Order, which, if one is to follow them, reifies an era of suspicion. In this context their work does not escape the contemporary paranoid style; it allies itself with the activities of conspiracy theoreticians.

The neo-conceptualist work of Bureau d'Etudes is concerned with mapping the different structures of financial networks by using complex graphics that formalise their models and connections with a semi-scientific exactitude. It could be viewed as a relevant reply to Jameson and his "poor's cognitive mapping" to map networks of power too vast to be adequately represented. Trevor Paglen, experimental geographer, writer and artist, works in the Department of Geography of the University of California, Berkeley. His work encodes and decodes cultural and physical landscapes. One of his projects documents the secret military "landscapes" in the United States, from clandestine installations in remote regions to massive infrastructures.

In the light of such artistic research, without doubt also because their demonstrations and results go through the visual, the mode of paranoia appears to be less ideology or faith than an inventive, effective and capacious practice of agency. Thinking about conspiracy theory is to raise the question of the legitimisation of knowledge and how to produce knowledge. One could indeed begin to ask questions about an aesthetics of paranoia, because the contemporary paranoid style is more than just an expression of marginalisation and alienation in a seemingly hostile world.

Translated from the French by Aruna Popuri; additional translation by Rana Dasgupta

NOTES

1. Peter Knight. *Conspiracy Culture: From the Kennedy Assassination to the X-Files* (Routledge, 2000, London).
2. The paradigm of contemporary conspiracy theory remains with regard to J. F. Kennedy's assassination. See Don DeLillo's novel *Libra* (Penguin, 1989, New York).
3. On the "suspect" condition after September 11, see (ed.) John Knechtel, *Suspect* (MIT Press, 2005, Cambridge).
4. The novelist Don DeLillo thinks that terrorism has become the main narrative mode for telling the world.
5. English translation: Thierry Meyssan, *9/11: The Big Lie* (Carnot USA Books, 2003, New York). The text and various responses to it can be consulted online: www.effroyable-imposture.net
6. Initially published in 1952, Richard Hofstadter's article "The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays" can be found in (ed.) Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999, London), pp. 3-21.
7. Thus the psychologist Floyd Rudmin proposes to consider conspiracy theories as "naive deconstructive history".
8. Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991, Durham). Elsewhere, Jameson has suggested that conspiracy narratives of Hollywood films are an expression of people's inability to make sense of how the world fits together in the age of globalisation. He argues that people turn to these kinds of stories because they seem to offer a simplified handle on what's really going on in the "contemporary multinational society"; see his *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indiana University Press, 1992, Bloomington). For a critical study, see Fran Mason, "A Poor Person's Cognitive Mapping", in (ed.) Peter Knight, op. cit., pp. 40-56.

9. George E. Marcus (ed.). *Paranoia within Reason: A Casebook on Conspiracy as Explanation* (University Press of Chicago, 1999, Chicago).
10. Jamer Hunt. "Paranoid, Critical, Methodical, Dali, Koolhaas and^a". In (ed.) George E. Marcus, *ibid.*, pp. 21-30. For the literary critic Timothy Melley, "the difference between a paranoid theory and a brilliant theory may only be a matter of how much explanatory power the theory has for a given interpretative community". See Melley's "Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy", in (ed.) Peter Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
11. Harry G. West and Todd Sanders (eds.). *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order* (Duke University Press, 2003, Durham/London).
12. Misty Bastian. "Diabolic Realities: Narratives of Conspiracy, Transparency, and 'Ritual Murder' in the Nigerian Popular Print and Electronic Media". In (eds.) Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, *ibid.*, pp. 65-91.
13. Jonathan Friedman. "From Roots to Routes: Tropes for Trekkers". In *Anthropological Theory* 11, 2 (2002).
14. Laurel Kendall. "Gods, Markets and the IMF in the Korean Spirit World". In (eds.) Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-64.
15. "Conspiracy theory^a begins^a with an attempt to defend the integrity of the self against the social order. To understand one's relation to the social order through conspiracy theory, in other words, is to see oneself in opposition to 'society'. Timothy Melley, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
16. Susan Harding and Kathleen Stewart. "Anxieties of Influence: Conspiracy Theory and Therapeutic Culture in Millennial America". In (eds.) Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-86.
17. Harry G. West and Todd Sanders (eds.), *ibid.*, p. 7
18. For instance, Berlin Transparency International, an organisation dedicated to combat corruption in the domain of international commerce, was founded in May 1993. www.transparency.de/index.html
19. Harry G. West and Todd Sanders (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 6
20. Anthony Giddens. *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 1990, Stanford).
21. Harry G. West. "Who Rules Us Now?" Identity Tokens, Sorcery, and Other Metaphors in the 1994 Mozambican Elections". In (eds.) Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-124.

Turbulent Spaces of Fragments and Flows

FELIX STALDER

Notions of homogeneity and linearity have played a key role in the theories underpinning the modern nation state, first in Europe, and then beyond. Since the Westphalian peace treaty ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648, the nation state has been defined by political sovereignty over a continuous, unambiguous territory inhabited by people turned into 'a people' (*ein Volk*, in German) on the basis of some more or less imagined, more or less coerced, communality; be that language, culture, history, manifest destiny, blood lines or something else. These notions have long been criticised, and with the all-too-visible erosion of political sovereignty over the last decade, their appeal has been seriously weakened in the domain of political theory. Yet, homogeneity and linearity have not disappeared as guiding ideologies of dominant political practice. On the contrary, they are reappearing with a vengeance in the realm of the market, expanded from a national framework to a global one.

As in the political field, the homogeneity of the market is also based on a particular concept of space as a static container, a stable Euclidean stage upon which history unfolds. Such a notion of space also informs those who try to image a counter-vision usually centering around concepts such as 'a global civil society'. Proposing that such a notion of space is untenable, this essay attempts to draw out some consequences of the spatial turbulences that are forcing us to radically rethink the space of politics and markets today.

Abandoning the commonsense notion of space as the unchanging ground upon which we stand, we can see that it is not an a-historical given. If we look at space from a historical perspective, we can observe; at least from the vantage point of Europe; space as an

acceleration and expansion of society since the beginning of modernity, interrupted by relatively short periods of deceleration and contraction. Put simply: collectively we learned, over time, to manage more space in less time. Technology played a major enabling role in this 'time-space compression'. Cities grew into metropolises, a world economy emerged, the whole planet became interconnected from the 17th century onwards, in close relationship with advances in communication, transportation, and, not to forget, accounting.

As profound as this development has been, it did not touch the basic definition and characteristics of space. Following sociologist and communications theorist Manuel Castells, we can define space as the material basis of time-sharing. In order to interact in real-time, one has to be in the same space, which has always been a single place. Space, then, could be thought of as a series of places, one next to the other. Indeed, time-space compression has meant that the relative distance between places was shrinking, yet their relationship remained characterised by just that: a distance that always expressed itself as a time lag in interaction. The assumption that entities which are in closer proximity can interact more quickly and that the time lag grows linearly with distance remained basically correct, despite the capacity to span time and space more extensively, quickly and reliably.

At some point in the 1980s, this changed. The historical development of time-space compression reached its limit. Distances had been shrinking to the point where the conventional notion of distance as a function of geography became meaningless. Yet rather than space disappearing, which some postmodernists predicted as the 'terminal condition', what we have been witnessing is the emergence of an entirely new kind of space, aptly termed the *space of flows* by Castells, the first and still most perceptive analyst of this historical discontinuity.

Space of Flows

The concept of the space of flows points to the emergence of a new material basis for time-sharing based on instantaneous electronic information flows. This has been long in the making, starting with the telegraph in the mid-19th century. Its real foundations, however, were laid in the 1970s when the development of the microprocessor coincided with capitalist firms restructuring themselves in order to escape a deep economic crisis. This created the push and the pull to incorporate into social institutions technology capable of generating and processing information flows. The space of flows then expanded massively. In the process, the physical environment in which these institutions operated also became restructured by the logic of the space of flows.

The key to this logic is that it is placeless, even if its physical components, quite obviously, remain place-based. Even a data centre is located somewhere. The people who operate it have their homes somewhere as well. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that the major financial centres are still located in New York, London and Tokyo, yet the dynamics of the global financial markets cannot be explained with reference to these places. The same logic also infuses the production of, say, clothing. Designed in Northern Italy, produced in Sri Lanka, marketed in New York, it is sold around the world in franchise stores that are locally managed but globally controlled. What is emerging is a new social

geography, highly dynamic and variable, which is no longer based on physical proximity but on the logical integration of functional units, including people and buildings, through the space of flows. The physical location of the various units is determined by the unequal ability of different places to contribute to the programmes embedded in the various networks. Whether production is located in China, Sri Lanka or Bulgaria is, from the point of view of the overall operation, irrelevant, as long as the factory is capable of providing the required services competitively.

In short, the connection between functional and physical distance has been broken. Yet, this is not the death of distance. Rather, distance is being reconfigured into a non-linear pattern.

Thus, we have certain areas within, say, Sofia, whose developmental trajectory does not follow that of Bulgaria as a whole, but is determined by other free trade zones in emerging economies. Indeed, the very concept of the free trade zone indicates that certain locales have been decoupled from their geographic environment. In a legally binding way, they are governed by a different set of rules than their 'host countries'. This in itself is not entirely new. Shipping harbours have always enjoyed certain exemptions from taxation, a freedom granted to stimulate trade and commerce. Yet traditionally, these pockets of extra-territoriality have been located at the borders of territories, facilitating the transition between them. Now, these zones are sprinkled across territories, severely undermining national sovereignty and territorial integrity. This has been the story of early 1990s, the result of commercially driven globalisation.

Fast-forward to today. The ability to operate translocally in real-time has diffused through society at large, though quite unequally. Small firms, semi-legal and fully illegal organisations, social movements and even individuals can network globally with relative ease. Thus, more and more places on which the social actors in these networks rely are becoming decoupled from their local environments, and determined by translocal flows of people, goods, money, and culture. This is happening on all scales, including the centres of the global economy as well as the extensive threaded networks of the grey economies, which function as simultaneous and parallel global production chains.

These networks are highly specific. They can easily adapt their components as required by changing demands or self-selected goals. Thus, they only need to cooperate with those who match their particular mix of shared culture and purpose. However, cultural specificity is not an option but a functional requirement for organised networks. Relying on adaptation and cooperation rather than on command and control, they need to establish a distinct internal culture in order to build trust, and facilitate communication. Corporate mergers apparently fail so often because the managers cannot fashion a new and sufficiently collaborative 'corporate culture' from the existent ones.

On a societal level, the cultural differentiation between the networks is growing. From within the network, this appears as a process of integration and 'community' or 'team' building. From the point of view of physical space, which none of the network actors ever escapes, this appears as a process of fragmentation and of the increasing isolation of social actors from one another, despite the fact that they might share the same physical

space. Again, this is not just an elite process, but it has advanced to such a degree that it applies to the highly connected as well as to the seemingly disconnected. In fact, the two groups mirror each other. In many ways people are not 'more connected' than before, but rather, the connections which characterised dominant processes (even within the counter-culture, or the grey economies) are increasingly made and maintained in the space of flows. The flip side of this ability to forge translocal connections is that those connections made in the space of places are becoming weakened. There is no need to relate to others just because they are physically present.

Yet, this need not necessarily be evidence of hyper-individualisation, but of the building of local nodes able to act within translocal networks. The size of each node depends on this function within the network, and ranges from the lonely coder with a broadband connection, to large production facilities on the ground, as well as small, specialised firms and family enterprises of all sizes. Nevertheless, places (and people) can be bypassed, rendered invisible from the point of view of those operating through the space of flows. This new form of exclusion applies to entire regions as well as to particular neighbourhoods. It works on all scales and in all domains.

In cities, this expresses itself through the twin processes of global homogenisation and local diversification. We have a McDonald's in virtually every city on the planet. Yet, increasingly, there is no way to predict what will be located right next to it. On the ground, the many globals and locals mix in seemingly random ways. The result is a kind of a patchwork of cultures and their physical expressions jumbled together in agglomerations, sprawling metropolitan regions held together by fast transportation networks. These regions emerge without much planning. Often they don't even have a name (such as the nameless region comprising London, Paris and Amsterdam, that can be traversed in either direction within a few hours). The people who live on or travel between these patches ; are, quite naturally, building their own cultures that enable them to deal with this new, fragmented reality, increasingly without reference to the geographic place as whole. Consequently, the focus of this new 'community' or network-centric culture is on internal rather than on external communication. Community building is both a means and an end. Community, understood as translocal networks, is what constitutes a new space, a realm of action ; for the CEO as much as for the illegal migrant. But these similarities are merely structural. The practical realities that each actor is able to generate are, of course, very different.

Fragmented Places, Heterogeneous Cultures

Historical experience has shown that the attempts to impose homogeneity within nation states and defend that against others has involved considerable violence ; ranging from overt war to the sometimes subtle devaluation of all kinds of minorities and outsiders, who threatened the social ideals of a unified people pacified within clearly demarcated territories. It also established a new ruling class: those with command over large administrative bodies, creating and benefiting from the new homogeneity.

For a long time, the tension between idealised homogeneity and factual heterogeneity was thought of as a lack of 'development', a kind of residual from earlier, messier and less enlightened times, poised to disappear in due course. This ideal can no longer be maintained. It is not the lack of 'development' that is producing such turbulence on the ground. On the contrary, the shattering of space into re-configurable fragments, threaded together on the basis of networked particularities, is a result of the most advanced socio-economic processes. So, rather than a neatly ordered pyramid of governance with the national institutions at the top, we have a virtually endless number of actors ; some public, some private, some commercial, some non-profit ; who produce governance effects through the endless reconfiguration of their relationships, based on the particular issue they want to influence. In the process, basic categories of politics have been rendered meaningless, such as the distinction between interior and exterior affairs, between public and private institutions, and so on.

The governance effects thus produced have so far not been particularly successful (in terms of reaching their own stated goals such as reducing poverty, saving the environment, stopping nuclear proliferation). Yet at the very least, they reflect a tacit acknowledgment that the field of political actors has become extremely mixed; this can be understood as an acknowledgment of the realities of fragmented space. Strangely enough, on the level of the market, the ideological emphasis on homogeneity and unity has grown stronger, rather than weaker. We are supposed to live in a single global market. In order to maintain this fiction, entire domains of economic activities, comprising the majority of people in many countries, have to be declared 'illegal'. I'm not referring here to traditional organised crime, but to the vast areas of economic activities that happen outside of legal regulation, undertaken by people who have no recourse to the legal system, but who manage ; sometimes very successfully, at other times barely at subsistence level ; to produce goods and services on which a vast number of people are dependent for daily survival.

It would be entirely wrong to think of these 'grey markets' as backward, small, local affairs involving only basic goods. Rather, they also include global production and distribution chains, high-tech goods, and considerable ingenuity and innovation. These are constantly downplayed, ignored and criminalised by the dominant discourses and practices. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of markets is an essential aspect of contemporary economies and will not go away. 'Development' is not a road out of social messiness, but one leading deeper into it.

Thus, if we want to understand what is happening today, we have to get rid of the master narratives. The massive stage upon which these could unfold has been shattered. The social reality of space is no longer homogenous and stable. Rather, we have to rebuild our categories of experience and understanding based on our recognition of the spaces of turbulences produced by fragmented locales and translocal flows. Our goal should not be to find uniform solutions for the problems of others (e.g., the poor or marginalised). Rather, we have to devise flexible frameworks that can be appropriated by networks of different people ; on terms respectful of their uniqueness, rather than through the imposition of

homogeneity. An understanding of how deeply the social construction of space has been transformed over the last few decades is an essential part of this process.

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The Terror of Having a Body

BAIJAYANTA MUKHOPADHYAY

The man who holds no bitterness for his one-eyed son speaks to us so as we disband. I sense he has watched the protest from afar. I have been hovering on its sidelines with two others, trying to avoid arbitrary arrest. He approaches us and says by way of introduction, "My son lost an eye in the attacks. I just wanted to let you know that I hold no bitterness".

We stand in stunned silence. We live in new times where old etiquette can no longer guide us. My friend gathers the wherewithal to say, "I'm sorry?"

He repeats. Slowly, as though we do not understand the language. "My son". Hand to his chest. "Lost his eye". He indicates his own left eye with his fingers. "In the attacks". No gesture. "I have no bitterness". Hands down by his side.

Pause. "OK", my friend finally says cheerily, as though strangers regularly accost her with offers of redemption, as though she had inured herself to the fact that her very presence continuously wounds the world. "Thank you".

I say nothing, suspicious of this man's self-conscious demonstration of moral superiority to handy bystanders. His suffocating need for witness is studied, his soulful demeanour thus hostile. Has he considered what we are to do with the burden of his forgiveness?

We are taught how to respond to anger, but he does not confess to a quest for revenge. What do we do now? We would have been peculiarly vindicated, had he approached us with the demand to hand over an eyeball each. I have recently learned that the Biblical exhortation to exact an eye for an eye is, in fact, a command to limit revenge to what has

been done to you, not to exceed it. The scripture does not justify vengeance, but pleads that punishment should fit the crime.

But not even that, in these numbed, numbing times. Rather, we are saddled with his misplaced generosity. Did he choose us because we too were protesting planned revenge for the attacks?

Or were we suicide bomber emissaries by default, meant to convey this man's magnanimity directly to headquarters? Since we were not with him, we must have been against him, against his son, hiding missing eyeballs in sleeves, backpacks, the fragile organs so small, yet unfailingly encompassing all human beauty in blooming irises. In eyeballs we seek contact, crystal balls through which we hope to see our own future.

But crystal balls shatter. Humanity is obliterated, beauty broken. Why should sight, that most intricate of senses, be housed in so defenceless a ball, nothing more than glorified jelly, vulnerable to every piece of passing shrapnel? His son's loss of an eyeball is surely more the fault of evolution (or design) than anything we ; harried, bitterly ineffectual protesters ; could claim as our own?



Hulking men carrying machine guns protect my security. It is difficult, I have learned, to differentiate between lust and suspicion in people's eyes. Both looks are hooded, invasive ; the grasp in glances of leering recognition.

I meticulously shun eye contact, however. Communication begets miscommunication, even in silence, a danger I do not wish to risk with those armed. I know they are trying desperately not to look at me either. One is evidently embarrassed when I catch him watching me warily out of the corner of his eye. I am not supposed to be guilty enough to be nervous around him; he is not meant to be prejudiced enough to be nervous around me.

And yet, here we are, trapped in sidelong glances and racing pulses, ready to throw ourselves at one another at the slightest menace, at the slightest invitation.



Urban settings on edge with watchful alertness. A girl waits for the train on the platform. She carries her weapon for all to see. Blue lumps mottle her cheek, the right corner of her lip misshapen by swelling.

I am fascinated. Malignant tumour? Genetic disease?

She hangs back, leaning against a pillar behind me. She keeps herself deliberately aloof, her gaze scrupulously avoiding catching another. In battle, one cannot humanise the enemy.

This face captivates me, the spectacle of distant hostilities right here on my daily commute, a war raging closer than a television screen. I know she knows that she must be watched. I wonder how she prepares herself to bear the world uncovered.

But why should she not bare her truth? She is merely a mirror to our own decaying, dying bodies. But we do not want to see ourselves in her: we set her apart. She is deformed and defective, somehow *less*. Let men lose limbs in battles of political principle; women need only assault our senses to disappoint us. Amongst our fellow commuters, I notice a

woman who catches sight of the girl. Her face falls, an expression of resignation, disgust, pity flitting across it: *so this is what it must come to in the end.*

I feel protective of the girl. Do I shield her from my own intrusive gaze? Do I want to rush to her defence even though she shows no need for my intervention? Though she copes with the light of day by lurking against walls, in shadows, she has walked out into the world of her own accord; her eyes may be downcast, but she holds her head high. I want to kiss her on the lips (is it contagious?) and tell her she is beautiful.

Because she is, of course.



A photographer rakes through a morgue in the spirit of witness.

Bodies wrapped in plastic sheeting in close-up shots. Set alight at a protest.

I try not to gawk, but I do. Who set them on fire? Themselves? Others? Why? What did these sinews desiccated to straw yellow achieve, this suggestion that human bodies are nothing but string and hay?

Did they win what they wanted?

I return over and over again, appalled at my own fascination. My interest in these features flattened by flame, in nostrils narrowed by disintegrating flesh, is unholy. Although naked, with clothes burned or burned into flesh, which mother could recognise her child as at birth? She cannot look into the unseeing eyes, as lids have melted shut, eyelashes gone, pools of charred meat in the sockets ; have the eyeballs survived underneath or do they evaporate first? What smile can she identify when mouths are locked in grinning grimaces, lips fused with the gums over yellowed teeth ; were they always this shade or were they smoked to this hue? Does she see her child's embrace in the contortions of the body, the bizarre twists of muscle ; the product of chemistry or agony, muscles dehydrating, shrinking in heat or someone's pain, calcifying as they die?

A seven-year-old is temporarily under my care for two working days at the office. None of the pictures are at her eye-level. I am thankful, feeling compelled to protect the child from the reality of the world, although I am not required to make such weighty parenting decisions for her. All I need to offer is an avuncular tenderness to this child, whom I play with as a favour to a busy colleague.

But I panic. "What are those?" I imagine her asking quizzically. In the naïveté with which I imbue her innocence, she will not be able to distinguish the humanoid shape of the remains.

Entropy will not spare childhood forever. Who am I to protect her? But who am I not to? Do I callously, flatly, state that we are just meat, leave it to her mother to deal with the consequent nightmares? Should I lie, speak of it as a large feast of barbecued chicken?

How easily humans cook, exhorting us to vegetarianism or to cannibalism? Some mystics eat human flesh to underline that all is equal in the eyes of the divine, all creation is fallible, all material reality undifferentiated in its impurity. Not even we are sacrosanct, they remind us. Not even the human body is sacred, they say, dismantling our last great hope for religion.



We are a people accustomed to burning the body in death, and yet we are distraught at the indignity of having a statesman's charred ribcage and skull be flashed on national television, almost as if he had been caught in a state of undress. What is he doing on television *without his whole body on?*

A newspaper reports, heart-broken, on another statesman's death; a woman sobs that she only managed to recognise her beloved leader by the back of his head. His remains are protected from the glare of cameras by a coffin as it is set alight in order not to violate the remembered integrity of his body. We cannot destroy our secret faith in resurrection.



Death can come in a myriad ways; we do not argue with it once it arrives. Surviving is trickier. We are given a new body in birth by fire, conceived in rage, nurtured by flame. After a blaze at a major city station, there are articles featuring survivors. One tabloid rends hearts with a story about a woman who waits by her lover's bedside, "even though", the story sighs, his once long, guitar-playing fingers have been reduced to scorched stumps. The story obliquely commends the woman for her generosity in committing to this stranger, this demon lover who emerged from hell to claim her as his own.



Bodies broken by bombs. People try to reassemble what remains into a semblance of the person who no longer exists, as though this jigsaw puzzle were all that keeps life together. The media flashes images of bystanders huddled in conference as these pieces lie at their feet, unable to understand where that last piece has gone, as otherwise they'd have him back together in a jiffy, dammit.

Where is the blood? Either this man exploded in a very considerate manner, or he has died a while ago, blood thickening. He has broken up very neatly, as though the human body were riddled with fault lines, predisposed to fracture at those junctions where it has been hastily patched together when shattered before. His face is handsome, long lashes covering his eyes. His hair is still scrupulously styled. It is somehow hard to believe he is dead.

His head is resting on the upper jaw, as his lower jaw and chin are nowhere to be seen, not even attached to the throat and shoulders which lie next to his head, his limbs arranged in careful pieces below. Maybe it is just the lower jaw his friends are missing in trying to put him together again. How cruel the irony: even if he were to open his eyes, he would have no jaw to use to demand that it be returned to him.

It is a photograph in the newspaper. Would the man's wife recognise her private knowledge of his body in that picture, his incessant, climactic martyrdom replayed constantly in the public's imagination? Those of us who can afford to consume the frailty of human life as we casually sip our tea in the morning, perusing our highbrow press, can be horrified at the outsourcing of our political struggles to people with barbaric methodologies. Others have to live the consequences. The titillation the media duly produces for us flaunts our own undignified privilege. We can continue to recoil in polite horror at one-eyed faces,

four-fingered hands, mottled cheeks, ravaged skin. It is not chance that has kept us together; it is the leisure of shelter, of not having to risk more than swollen tendons or a paper-cut in reading these words. Our delicacy is a luxury. Fragility does not survive through luck; it can only be bought with crisp, crinkling cash.



An aerial view of a shattered street. It is dark; only streetlights pool in certain corners. Damage stretches the length of the road. Emergency personnel mill about in clusters. From a distance, they seem rather casual, amiable. I can imagine them cracking jokes in the still evening air. In the shadows, I spot two bodies. Where is the rest of the death toll? I squint. The two in view seem too whole to be bombers. One lies in his leather jacket. He has fallen flat on his face, his arms placed as though put out to break a fall he knew was coming, as though he is just about to get up again. It will be difficult, as he only has one leg. I cannot find the other leg lying anywhere in sight. Who took it?

A little bit away, another outstretched figure lies in the middle of the street. I can dimly discern a jacket; his upper body is lost in shadows. My imagination exploits this rich absence of material. I do see his legs clearly, as they lie in the light, in shorts, his sport socks and sneakers clearly visible even in this blurred, distant photograph in newsprint. I try to delineate his form, but my eye can only make sense of it if I assume that the blur at his midriff hides that he has been separated at the waist. I am not being gory; he cannot be that tall. Can he? He has nice legs, though.

Had. I shift uncomfortably. I am obscene. But I do not like referring in the past tense to something I can still see, pretending it is no longer there. But once we are dead, we cease to possess. Even beauty is no longer ours.



Skins stained black, brown, red and yellow are already marred. We only gasp in horror at the desecration when blood splatters or water wrinkles white.

We obsess about these double standards, forgetting that this guilt centres attention on us yet again, assumes our laxity is still central when everyone else has moved on, moved much farther on.

Remember Hiroshima, we intone every August. Remember that the terror of having a body is not new.



We claim that some spread death by violence, others death by illness, but denying that we really carry our end within us. Others may think they have killed us, but the victory is false, we were all dying long ago. The accidents that cut lives short are not accidents at all, nor do they cut lives short. It is natural, normal, for lives to end senselessly, abruptly, absurdly. The real freaks of nature are those who, by one long series of flukes, escape the relentless logic of mortality. They are those whom probability misses all their lives, which

they accidentally live for decades until the quiet end in bed, all their organs and appendages intact. Youth worship is such an aberration, an abomination ; age is the honour, the glorious ludicrousness of having survived.



Soon, a generation of bodies born in war will populate our tribes. Our conceptions of a whole body will shift to embrace these new shapes awkwardly. We are global citizens, as we are tirelessly reminded. But we are global citizens who leave bits of ourselves wherever we go, nonchalantly dropping body parts in careless explosions in Buenos Aires, Washington, Helsinki, Cape Town, Delhi, Manila ; until our passport, our citizenship, will be marked by our headless, limbless torsos, perforated and patterned with scars.

And embrace we will. No longer the leper colonies! Now, we notice appealing fragility; we want to conquer what we consider already vulnerable in order to assert their own invincible power. Now, we watch survivors of war, wide-eyed at the glamour; those of us who have never had to confront it secretly wish to possess this sexy will to survive for which our flabby, complacent bodies have never had the need. We want to possess triumph, to dominate the indomitable.



At a conference, a friend introduces a man to me. He is an activist from a Latin American movement. I immediately colour his life with all the political intrigues and machinations that I assume this involvement means ; drug mafia and guerrilla resistances, for example. I am sitting down, and he smiles amiably down to me from his great height. He sticks out his right hand.

I watch the smile in his eyes fade in the split second I hesitate as I register that the top of his index finger had been cut off, the digit is nothing more than a stump. In that instant, I remember a Roald Dahl character who has no thumb. Her grandson gruesomely muses that a kettle steamed it off. Although perhaps, he speculates later, it was lost in torture in some battle against evil.

Why do I assume this man's missing phalange is the result of some heroic sacrifice to principle? Why not a domestic dispute?

I am sure that I am graceful enough not to recoil perceptibly, but his reaction ; he must be sensitive ; belies my confidence. I swear I will now steel myself before every potential handshake. *The hand offered may not be like yours is now, I recite, but shake it anyway.*



There is a man on the train who limps. Two friends who do not limp accompany him. They are Somali, I decide. We neurotically see Somalia everywhere. I try to imagine this lagging man in a dusty, dry street far away. In my imagination, Somalia resembles a country-western movie set. The man does not limp there. What made him limp, I speculate? A bullet in his back? Noxious gases in his nerves? Shrapnel in his skull? In the right hemisphere of

his skull. I refine my hypothesis: his entire left side cruelly trails his intentions.

He has to have been made this way by an act of man; he cannot have been born this way of woman. We do not live in a world where such things are explained away as fate, we do not believe in such unseemly lack of control. Our bodies are who we are, after all. Beauty is an accomplishment, a credit to the person for staving off deterioration, degradation. On the day of judgement, no one will need to have asked how you lived. Your body cannot, will not, lie.

This man's body does not lie. Bullets we bought bludgeoned Somalis to death. Their war-wounded in wheelchairs are now welcomed to these shores in hand-wringing, collective guilt. Their bodies are a memento to how fragile our own humanity, our own wholeness is. As they arrive, maybe we who have been sheltered too long will understand that wars are lived daily, that daily life is war.



Wardrobes are the frontline. One man and three women board the bus with a baby. Two women have covered their heads. The third ; the smallest ; is completely covered from head to toe in a black robe, slits for eyes. Everyone is curious, but is pretending not to be. The women sit. The man stands with the baby in his arms ; how liberated of him, I can see some people thinking. And yet, why does he demand these double standards for his women? Is the swathed one his wife, so completely his, so wretchedly beautiful?

Or did she choose it for herself, out of that obsession to obliterate bodies? The unknown unsettles us. Who knows what she hides within her? Surely it is too warm to wear that layer. This is no desert climate, where women need to trap water against their skin. Did she leave home firing off that staple punchline Arab comediennes have made famous, "Does this *burqa* make my bomb look big?"



I watch a man mutter aloud as he holds open a little green book on the bus. Why is he talking to himself? I eye his briefcase suspiciously. No one is allowed to carry anything with impunity these days. In fact, I imagine everyone would be happier if we were simply to walk stark naked through the streets. Having a body itself is incriminating, it will reveal its answers: just apply duress.

This man's skin and mine are meant to align us in an axis of solidarity: our bodies have become our belonging. But I betray it; I stumble to leap off the bus before his prayer takes us with him, closer to his god. Public prayer in these parts can only mean trouble. I watch the bus continue trundling along the artery, refusing to explode.



We burst both into song and flame. The body has been a work of art, long before it became a weapon. He walks as though he has forgotten what it is to be afraid in one's skin. He walks as though he has forgotten how afraid others are of his skin. He warbles soulfully to himself as he walks ahead of me. I catch snatches of music. I watch his hips shift slightly

to the beat. I admire his courage to inhabit space as though nothing has changed. He reclaims his body as an instrument of pleasure, inviting us to trip the dangerous fuse between hedonism and death.



A woman in the market smiles at me. She has no reason to, we are merely pawing through the same oranges, but she looks up and smiles. I smile back reflexively, unthinkingly. But later, I want to track her down amongst the dairy stalls to smile back with conviction, with gratitude. Some would claim that her smile was a pre-emptive strike, catching me off guard in case I were about to attack. But I know she did not see violence seeping out of my pores; I do not exhale destruction like some latter-day deity gone berserk. She just smiled, without fear, without suspicion.

Our bodies loom threatening, dying. Yet how did we evolve ; who designed us so intelligently ; that this small chorus of tendons, this intricate assembly line of sixty-odd facial muscles, wins us redemption?

Disaster Signs

PRADEEP SAHA

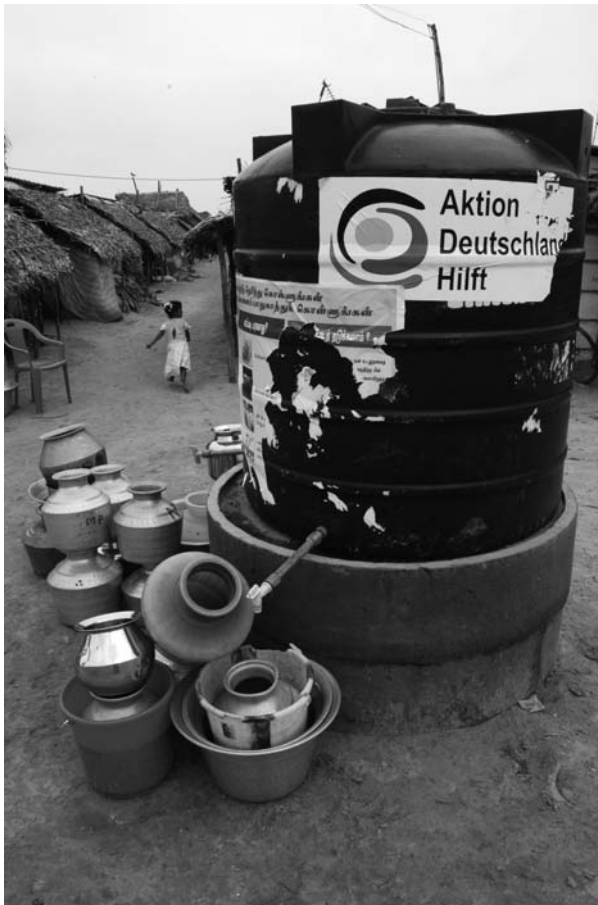












An Aesthetic of Turbulence: The Works of Ned Kahn

DAVID MATHER

Steady, helmsman! steady. This is the sort of weather when brave hearts snap ashore, and keeled hulls split at sea.

¡ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

In the early 1960s, chaos emerged as a vexing scientific issue closely related to predicting weather. Using complex math functions, meteorologist Edward Lorenz found that minuscule changes in initial inputs could radically alter the results of some experiments. Lorenz's 'Butterfly Effect' describes, by way of analogy, how the flapping of butterfly wings does affect the atmosphere and could, over time, cause a tornado. This analogy for transformation and Lorenz's experimental observations both try to convey the extreme sensitivity to input of some systems, such as climate. After 40 years, the study of chaos has become relevant to computer science, aero- and fluid dynamics and systems theory, but its special bond with weather prediction persists. The weather ¡ long a mythic symbol of beauty, power, and even cruelty ¡ now has an up-to-date association with chaos and complexity, due in part to the Butterfly Effect.

It's no wonder, then, that Ned Kahn's work with complex natural systems elicits mythic and contemporary associations. An artist from Northern California, Kahn replicates the forms and forces of nature. Happening across his work can be a stupefying experience, as it was for this author, since typically invisible or unobservable forces are felt as immediate, bodily experiences, as natural effects, which are only later discovered to have been artificially constructed. The planet's complex, random and aleatory perturbations become

manifested visually, tactilely and acoustically in his work. At times he re-creates environmental conditions in controlled settings, and at other times, he lets nature animate his works. Across the breadth of his work, the artist expertly choreographs natural phenomena ; a skill more often attributed to gods or supernatural entities than to humans. For example, in the Babylonian Creation Myth, Marduk defeats Tiamat by forcing wind into her belly; other examples include Ehecatl, the Aztec god of wind and the Lakota Creation Myth.¹ Kahn combines science, art and technology to integrate natural, human, and artificial systems, and his specific works emphasise natural elements, such as water, fire, wind and sand; how these behave independently, and how they interact.



(Left) *Slice of Wind*, 1996, School of Engineering, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado; (centre left) *Wind Veil 8*, 2000, Gateway Village, Charlotte, North Carolina; (centre right) *Tornado*, 1990; (right) in *Turbulent Landscapes* exhibit, Natural History Museum, London, 2002

Indeed, a key element for Kahn is wind, and many of his projects require air currents. For example, *Slice of Wind* (1996), at the University of Colorado at Boulder, comprises 10,000 metal discs that move freely and reflect light as the wind passes. This idea of making wind visible with movable, reflective parts operates on a larger scale in an installation in Charlotte, North Carolina. Containing 80,000 aluminium panels and measuring 6 storeys high and 260 feet wide, *Wind Veil 8* (2000) adorns the side of a parking structure. Wind streams and eddies move across the vertical sheets of metal discs, casting intricate shadows inside the building. In a project at Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts in San Francisco, air currents sculpt a dense fog that rises from a ring of stones in the courtyard. In this case, the amorphous, shifting water vapour reveals the movement of the air.

Kahn also re-creates dynamic wind currents ; or turbulence, as he calls it ; within controlled settings inside buildings. *Tornado* (1990) is a sleek, 12-foot-high structure containing a dancing airborne funnel of whirling fog. Air blowers inside the work's upper and lower platforms create a strong updraft, while a fog generator introduces water vapour into the resulting vortical airflow. With no glass or other barriers between viewers and the vortex, the installation invites interaction with the resulting mini-twister. "If you gently run your hand through it, it will curve and recover", Kahn explains. "But if you jump through it or

wave your hands rapidly inside it, you completely disrupt the airflow, and it disappears. Sometimes it takes many minutes before the vortex can reorganise itself"². With elegant simplicity, Kahn's Tornado illustrates the Butterfly Effect.



(Left) Duales Systems pavilion, Expo 2000, Hanover, Germany; (centre) pavilion interior with Kahn's tornado installation; (right) Duales pavilion at dusk showing semi-translucent construction material

Kahn created another, much larger tornado inside a pavilion at the 2000 World's Fair in Hanover, Germany. Collaborating with German architect Uwe Bruckner and sponsored by Duales Systems, Kahn produced a whirlwind 7 storeys high. Large turbines moved the air inside the pavilion, while an ultrasonic humidifier fed an updraft with fog. The twister resided in a tall cylindrical atrium surrounded by an observation ramp, metal scaffolding, acrylic panels and semi-translucent film.³ This project required a delicate balance among natural, human and artificial systems, and its grand scale compares to another large-scale weather project by Danish conceptual artist Olafur Eliasson.

Like Kahn's project, Eliasson's *The Weather Project* (2003) at the Tate Modern in London provoked immediate and intense responses. Eliasson simulated the setting sun inside the museum's large Turbine Hall. The massive illusion consisted of diffuse yellow light reflecting on a mirrored ceiling.⁴ The realism of the installation and its iconic quality, especially in wintry London, created a sense of calming immersion. Conversely, Kahn's giant tourbillon in Hanover conveyed a sense of awe and anxiety by confronting viewers with a turbulent natural system. By introducing weather into the exhibit spaces, Kahn and Eliasson surprised visitors in their comfortable surroundings. Also, in both projects the artists created persuasive illusions by cloaking their tools and materials; the technologies they use to create the artificial effects of unmediated nature are often hidden from sight or not apparent to the viewer.

Among the many other artists who examine natural complexities, the American light and space artist James Turrell and British environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy depend to an extraordinary degree on environmental conditions. Both artists make works about perception of nature, often requiring the artists or the viewers to visit remote geographic locations. As an example, Turrell's 30-year project *Roden Crater* is located outside a small town in Northern Arizona, along a dusty, circuitous road that is far from the highway or any

human activity. Also, Goldsworthy's numerous site-specific projects involve his trekking into the distant reaches of pristine environment. In contrast to Turrell, Goldsworthy and Eliasson, however, Kahn harnesses kinetic, natural forces within formal, exhibition settings, and his works come to resemble interactive science experiments.

Two examples of such work are Kahn's presentations of chaotic, vortical patterns using fire and water. At Technorama in Switzerland, *Fire Vortex* (1997) consisted of a pool of burning kerosene from which serpentine flames leap into a 20-foot-high whirlwind. Distinct from his work with water vapour, *Fire Vortex* presents intrinsic danger, a menacing contrast with the sinuous shape. Another work, *Encircled Steam* (1995), made in collaboration with Atelier Architects of Seattle, is a permanent, outdoor work that releases water every few minutes to form a vortex in a shallow, funnel-like basin. The whirlpool displays unpredictable patterns as it drains toward the centre. Both projects further demonstrate a skilful control of natural elements, specifically natural vortices, and both are supported by intricate technical systems.



(Left) Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2003, Tate Modern, London; (centre) Ned Kahn, *Fire Vortex*, 1997, Technorama, Winterthur, Switzerland; (right) Ned Kahn, *Encircled Steam*, 1995, in Seattle Center, Seattle, Washington

Kahn's technically sophisticated installations resemble the highly choreographed manner of an important work by collaborators Peter Fischli and David Weiss ; the 16mm colour film *The Way Things Go* (1987). As a real-time chain reaction of experiments using gravity, chemistry, physics and pyrotechnics, *The Way Things Go* has been elaborately staged so that one experiment triggers another in a mind-boggling sequence that runs 30 minutes. The interaction of liquids, solids and gases produces a sequence centred on natural elements and their semi-random behaviours. The causal progression from one experiment to another is tenuous ; seeming to break down, then elegantly and improbably resuming. Suspenseful despite its lack of story and characters, this film is, according to *Village Voice* art critic Jerry Saltz, "their masterpiece, and one of the best films ever made by artists". *The Way Things Go* relates to Kahn's oeuvre through its depiction of natural turbulence, verging on chaos, that has both scientific and poetic value. Projects that operate like science experiments illustrate both empirical and symbolic significance.

Kahn's interactive scientific projects leave little doubt about his command of meteorological processes. Through his immense technical ability, he demonstrates the versatility of turbulent systems, such as the vortices of wind and water. He employs diverse mechanical, pneumatic and electrical technologies to design, build and refine his installations. This is how he constructs dazzlingly complex but comprehensible images of nature that respond to viewers, conform to architectural structures, and reveal environmental conditions.



(Left) Fischli and Weiss, still from *The Way Things Go*, 1987; (centre) Ned Kahn working on *Turbulent Orb*, 1990, at the Exploratorium, San Francisco; (right) Makrolab in Perthshire, Scotland, 2002

Kahn's commitment to involving his audience interactively in his scientific and technological research developed early in his career. After graduating from college with an environmental studies degree, from 1982 to 1996 he designed educational exhibits at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. He apprenticed there to Frank Oppenheimer, the centre's founder and brother of atomic physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer. Dedicated to hands-on involvement, this landmark facility promotes ways to combine scientific knowledge and educational aims with technological expertise. Kahn, who flourished in this research-and-development setting, began developing his ideas independently in the late 1980s ; with substantial success. Kahn has received prestigious awards, including a 2003 MacArthur Fellowship and Cooper-Hewitt's 2004 National Design Award for Environmental Design. His background within a laboratory setting reinforced a methodology of collaboration and experimentation, as well as an empirical aesthetic of direct experience. "Part of my philosophy", Kahn says, "is that in our culture, with its increased interest in computers and television and media ; with the bombardment of mediated experiences ; people have fewer and fewer opportunities to nurture their ability to observe and look closely. So my underlying goal is to create objects or places designed to encourage and nurture observation"⁵. His faith in observation tends to conceal the mediation ; the technical finesse and the high-tech materials ; needed create illusions of direct experience. However, by emphasising observation, Kahn affirms the practice common to both science and art: a reliance on experience as a vital component of knowledge.

Ned Kahn presents projects both in scientific settings and in art contexts. By occupying these cultural arenas simultaneously, his work and his ideas are interpreted within separate

discourses ; as educational, scientific demonstrations or as aesthetic objects. Asked whether his work is more science or art, he replies, "they're definitely not scientific experiments, because they're often much more uncontrolled and complicated⁵ On the other hand, they're not really artworks in the traditional sense⁶ In the things that I make, even though I've created the physical structure, it's really not me that's doing the sculpting"⁶.

Kahn's modesty aside, it is clear that his work straddles art and science contexts ; his is a scientific aesthetic. His projects involve simulating turbulent systems, and he conducts laboratory experiments using natural elements, highly controlled conditions, and numerous technologies. Kahn's projects can also be compared to those of a collaborative group of artists called Makrolab, which investigates meteorological concepts, among other research topics of scientific and aesthetic value.

A mobile research facility with attached residence, Makrolab invites artists and researchers for two-week to three-month visits along its established itinerary ; Germany (1997), Australia (2000), Scotland (2002), Italy (2003), Southern Africa (2005), Canada (2006), Iceland (2006) and Antarctica (2007). Participants gather data and test hypotheses on a wide variety of subjects, such as weather patterns and bird migration. Slovenian artist and Makrolab founder Marko Peljhan defines the project as a "closed and isolated/insulated environment" that functions as a "communication centre and a reflective tool-machine" used to "observe the world only through mediators"⁷. Working in isolated geographic places, researchers directly observe and record atmospheric, environmental, and astronomical phenomena. By eschewing symbolic representations of nature, Makrolab instead asks viewers to determine aesthetic and scientific significance for themselves ; a bold framing of interdisciplinary hermeneutics. As an implicit challenge to fine art conventions, this mobile studio-lab blurs the distinction between art and science, between aesthetics and empiricism. Kahn's work similarly blurs the categories of art and science, and his work also requires methodical, laboratory-style analysis of natural patterns. However, unlike the deliberate isolation of Makrolab, Kahn's experiments appear in public and institutional settings.

Kahn's works also provide insight into contemporary society. On the one hand, he has a strong commitment to making projects that respond to their environment and to individual viewers. On the other hand, he seeks out natural complexity, and he knows intimately how natural turbulence can develop in technological systems. His technologically intricate installations are premised on a desire to present natural systems to human viewers. These hybrid constructions, in effect, revise the assumed definitions of technological, natural, and social systems by showing their interdependence. As Swiss art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist says, "In our own lives, in our social environments, we see fluctuations and instability, many choices and limited predictability. Non-equilibrium physics has developed similar notions of 'unstable systems' and the dynamics of 'unstable environments'"⁸.

Kahn brings unpredictability and turbulence into a social context, and uses scientific and aesthetic strategies to make natural complexity vivid, comprehensible, and beautiful. Art and science both encourage ; if not demand ; keen observation of the natural world. Artists and scientists alike use empirical methods in their research, to test hypotheses and,

ultimately, to produce results. That these results often get swathed in disparate interpretations, depending on varied artistic or scientific contexts and on the perceived boundaries of institutional settings, such as an art museum, an educational science centre, or an engineering facility, does not undermine the validity of the observations. To quite the contrary, Kahn's projects exemplify contemporary tendencies to defy institutional and disciplinary categories, to invite public participation, and to integrate scientific and artistic aims. His is an aesthetic of turbulence.

NOTES

1. For other references to gods and climate, see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959, Orlando), pp. 120-22.
2. Jeff Greenwald. "Forces of Nature", *New Scientist*, 16 October 1999 (No. 2208).
3. Texlon is an inflatable fluoroelastomer construction material by Foiltec; see <http://www.foiltec.de>.
4. Olafur Eliasson, The Unilever Series, Tate Modern.
See <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/eliasson/understanding.htm>
5. Greenwald, op. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. See <http://makrolab.ljudmila.org/peljhan1.html>
8. Hans Ulrich Obrist. "Battery, Kraftwerk, and Laboratory (Alexander Dörner Revisited)". In (ed.) Carin Kuoni, *Words of Wisdom* (Independent Curators International, 2001, New York), p. 128.

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- Makrolab: <http://makrolab.ljudmila.org>
- Ned Kahn online data: <http://nedkahn.com>
- The Arts Catalyst (Scottish sponsor for Makrolab):
http://www.artscatalyst.org/projects/makrolab/MAK_index.html
- Turbulent Landscapes exhibition online: <http://www.exploratorium.edu/turbulent/index.html>

After the Deluge

GYAN PRAKASH

On 26 July 2005, the rain gods attacked Mumbai with relentless intensity.

Nearly 30 inches of monsoon rain lashed the city within a 24-hour period. Water flooded many neighbourhoods, and clogged the city's drains, roadways, and suburban rail network. Transportation came to a standstill, flights were cancelled, the stock exchange closed, schools and colleges shut down, and people waded or swam to safety.

In hindsight, the devastation was modest in comparison to what New Orleans endured just about a month later. But arriving in the city five days after the deluge, I could easily identify the deep impression that the flood had left on the city's surface and psyche. The water had retreated, but the craters it had carved on the streets seemed to carry a warning ; the next time the city may not be so lucky. The ground was still wet, and the streets, usually choked with traffic and people, appeared less than packed. This was no doubt due to the fact that the downpour on the previous two days had panicked the administration into urging people to stay indoors. The streets were desultory and the city appeared shabbier than usual.

When I asked the taxi driver in the western suburb of Bandra to take me to Kalina, one of the worst-affected neighbourhoods, at first he stared blankly. But recovering quickly, he said that it was safe to go there now. Once at the wheel, he made up for his earlier momentary loss of words, and talked incessantly and excitedly about the experience of the flooded city. He painted a picture of the city with images of stalled cars, taxis, auto-rickshaws, and buses that littered the streets, and of people wading through neck-high water in search of dry ground. He related his own experience of being trapped. When water rose above the seat of his cab, he had to abandon it and take shelter in a nearby high-rise

building. He was trapped all night, pacing restlessly, longing to return to his taxi and head home. He wondered about his family and friends, concerned that their shacks might have been washed away. Was this the end?

When we reached Kalina, his attention turned from himself to the neighbourhood. He pointed to the watermarks ten feet high on the wall. The lanes were still slushy, and cars and motorcycles stood forlornly, covered in mud. A sense of the wet, mildewed aftermath hung in the air. The brightly-lit shops on the main street could fool you into believing that nothing had happened. Although the flood had not spared commercial establishments, they were now swept clean of any signs of water damage, transacting business as usual. But the garbage piled right outside on the sidewalk broke this air of eerie normality. Mumbai's streets are not clean at the best of times. But this was not the usual litter and trash; it was heaps of household garbage and commercial merchandise covered in a rotting, deep-black sludge. It was as if the water had forced the city to bring its innards out in the open, exposing its decaying, putrid secrets.

Driving away from this scene of devastation and decay, we passed by tarpaulin-covered hutments standing along giant water pipes. The electric-blue tarpaulin roofs of the shanties shone brightly and defiantly in the rain. When I remarked that it was extraordinary that the poor had bounced back so quickly when they must have borne the brunt of the devastation, the taxi driver shook his head. It did not matter whether you were rich or poor, he said. Water washed away all differences, bringing the whole city to its knees. As it turns out, the flood did not devastate the entire city; South Bombay, the old core of the city, escaped largely unscathed. Nor is it the case that the rich and the poor suffered equally. Yet the taxi driver was not alone in his belief that the experience of wreckage was that of the city as a whole. This discourse was pervasive. It was widely recognised that certain areas and groups had suffered more than others, but the deluge was seen to have threatened Mumbai itself.

The flood evoked a primeval image. The idea of a city under water is the stuff of myths. It was nature biting back, punishing humans, its fury levelling their prized creation; the city. The urban government and infrastructure had proved defenceless against the wrath of celestial powers. Just a few months earlier, the business and political elites had been retailing dreams of turning Mumbai into a world-class city, of transforming it into another Shanghai. But those dreams had literally gone down the clogged drains. People recalled the experience with a shudder. They spoke of the torrential rain as a sudden and uncontrollable force that brought fears of immediate and unexpected death. It was not just the thought of one's own death but also the threatening prospect of the city going under that shook the nerves. Monsoon waterlogging was commonplace, but this was a frighteningly different sight; this was the city itself sinking, inch by inch. It produced a sense of being choked and trapped.

Many spoke about walking for hours in water with floating garbage, debris and animal carcasses, to reach their homes only to find them inaccessible. Others recounted being stuck in their marooned office buildings, and frantically calling their relatives to reassure them and to inquire about their well-being. Phones went dead and the mobile network was

jammed. There were numerous stories of parents anxiously seeking information about their children who could not return home from school, and of old people who could not get help and were trapped inside their apartments, without food and medicine.

The city's confidence was shattered. Each time it rained over the next few days, you could detect anxious looks. Was it ever going to stop? And then, a sense of relief when it did. This was unusual, for the monsoon is always greeted with happiness in India. In the countryside, a timely monsoon augurs a good crop, while in the cities it spells relief from the searing summer heat. The experience of that wet Tuesday had changed Mumbai's disposition. Stalled traffic, marooned buildings and neighbourhoods, stranded families, and a powerless administration conjured up a frightening image of chaos and dysfunction. When the flood arrested the normal motion in the city, it spilled into people's nerves and drove them into frenzy. Their psyche was shattered. Mumbai appeared imperilled; it was an urban dystopia, not a dream city but a nightmare.

A few months later I came upon a music video CD, titled *Museebat mein Mumbai*.¹ Containing Bhojpuri ballads that are accompanied by images of the flood, the music video introduces Mumbai in Distress with:

Kahal ja la Mumbai kabo sute la nahin
Kabo ruke la nahin
Kabo thake la nahin...

It is said that Mumbai never sleeps
 Never stops
 Never tires...

Then, cutting to the sounds and images of cars and trains screeching to a halt, a voice intones:

Lekin ai bhaiyya
Chabbis July din mangalwaar ko
Mumbai ruk bhi gayil
Mumbai thak bhi gayil ...

But O my brother
 On Tuesday 26 July
 Mumbai stopped
 Mumbai tired...

And then a little later, accompanied by images of people repeatedly trying their dead mobile phones:

*Band hoi gayile sabke phonwa mobile
Mumbai pe jaise baadalwa tooti aayee
Bijli katal tab le bhayil ba andheriya...*

Phones and mobiles went dead
As clouds burst on Mumbai
Lightning struck, lights went out
And darkness descended...

As the ballad narrates the sudden collapse of the city, it locates the catastrophe in the complete paralysis of communication caused by the flood. Stalled cars, trains, and planes, mobile and landline phone networks thrown out of gear, and a city enveloped in darkness due to power failure, conjure up an image of urban paralysis. Itself a product of modern media and technology, the Bhojpuri music video portrays the destroyed lives and the shattered dreams of immigrants in the picture of the abrupt failure of the machinic city.

One would think that the experience of floods and their destructive force would not be unfamiliar to Bihari immigrants. After all, almost every year the monsoon routinely submerges rural roads and villages in Bihar. But Mumbai? How could anyone imagine a flood here? A metropolis of 14 million, it is the *ur*-modern city in India. Of course, Kolkata and Chennai are also major metropolises. But, unlike them, Mumbai occupies its regional geography contentiously. The map locates it in Maharashtra ; the cartographic fact being the product of a political agitation in the 1950s ; but the Island City appears to inhabit another space, one that connects as much to its hinterland in Maharashtra as to other parts of India and the world. It is the space of capital. For long a vital hub of overseas trade and commerce, and the nursery of indigenous mercantile and industrial capital, it serves as the headquarters of major Indian corporations, and as an entry point for global conglomerates. Home to the enormously influential Hindi film industry and the centre of advertising and media corporations, the city projects cultural modernity.

So what had brought a major metropolis of modernity to its knees? Debates raged in the media. The government pointed fingers at the unusually heavy rain, pleading that no city could have coped with the scale and intensity of the downpour.

Activists and citizens blamed the authorities for allowing development that flouted all environmental norms and safeguards, and that was responsible for clogging drains and the river that drained the rain water to the sea. Some blamed New Delhi, asserting that the city of Mumbai received only a tiny portion of its huge tax contribution to the central exchequer; some raised the taboo topic of turning Mumbai into a city-state. Others heaped blame on the state government and the municipal authorities for ignoring, and contributing to, the dangers of an urban catastrophe that had been building for years. The air was thick with accusations and explanations.

Undoubtedly, the beating the city had taken brought on this mood of despair. But this dark sentiment also tapped into an existing discourse that portrayed the great city in ruins.

For some time now, scholars, writers, and journalists have been mourning the loss of the city of promise. Mumbai has never been an ordinary city, but a place of opportunities and dynamic energy. But the city's very dynamism, according to the commentators, was also its curse. Runaway growth had throttled old Mumbai. Post-industrial growth and expansion had seized hold of the scruff of Mumbai's neck with such remorseless force as to choke its life as a city. Where once textile mills and docks had hummed Mumbai's siren song, there was now the cacophony of the post-industrial megalopolis. Its streets, pavements and open spaces were under siege of armies of poor migrants, slum dwellers, hawkers and petty entrepreneurs. Bombay's legendary housing scarcity had reached an epic scale, and ; characteristically for the city ; provided opportunities to builders, politicians, and underworld dons to make a killing. Civic services were bursting at the seams. Nativist passions, communal riots and the nexus between corrupt politicians and greedy businessmen had destroyed civic consciousness and wrecked the city as a coherent space. Like many other Third World megacities, Mumbai appeared as a runaway metropolis, exploding out of its inherited shell, hurtling out of control, and racing towards dysfunction and disaster. The human bodies, animal carcasses, and garbage floating in the water had only brought to surface the malaise set deep in the city's body.

Identifiable in this scene of ruin and destruction are the outlines of a remembered city. Urban theorists speak of the city as a thing of the past, its identity overrun and scrambled by explosive urbanisation. But the rise of vast urban networks does not erase the idea of cities as particular places, each defined by its distinctive constellation of social space, history, and memory. It may be the case that the production of space ; binding centre and periphery, city and the countryside ; has superseded the city, but these do not determine the lived experience. Though cast off as history, the city does not vanish. In Mumbai, its shape peers through the images of the derelict environment, the corroded institutions, overrun infrastructure, and ethnic eruptions on the city's cosmopolitan skin. The unleashing of nature's wrath only sharpened the consciousness of the city as 'second nature'. In a flash, people became aware that Mumbai was a product of human artifice, an expression of the dreams and delusions of bending nature to culture.

If modernity is a Faustian bargain to unleash human potential and subdue nature to culture, then modern cities are its most forceful and enduring expressions.² The breathless intensity and the awesome power of modern life have made and remade cities across the world ; London and Paris, Shanghai and Hong Kong, Tokyo and Mumbai, New York and Mexico City. But if all modern cities represent the conquests of culture over nature, Mumbai's foundation is doubly parasitical. Built not only on lands stolen from the sea, it was also founded and developed to advance European trade and conquest; the term 'colonial' applies here in both these senses. This may not be immediately evident because of the unrelenting attempts to erase the colonial genealogy of the city, the most visible expression of which is the ubiquitous presence of Shivaji, the 17th-century warrior and a regional cultural icon. Public buildings named after him, and statues of him, abound, none more prominently than the striking representation of the warrior near the Gateway of India, mounted on his

horse, sword in hand. No longer does he have to share the city with King Edward VII, whose bronze statue astride a horse once stood nearby. According to a legend, the Maratha warrior and the English emperor dismounted nightly and battled each other while the city slept. Shivaji did not vanquish King Edward in their nightly duels, but the political activists did. In 1965, they defaced and then removed the statue. Today, a parking lot occupies the site, which is still known by the name of the absent statue, *Kala Ghoda* (Black Horse). With King Edward dispatched to the museum, further erasure of colonial history followed. The European names of streets, squares, and public buildings were replaced with Maharashtrian and nationalist ones.

Bombay is now officially Mumbai. The colonial era is abolished, dismissed as history. *Kala Ghoda*, which once signified imperial mastery, stands emptied of its colonial halo. The postcolonial present summons Shivaji, Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Dadabhai Naoroji and other regional and national icons to provide another cultural significance to the urban space. To this we can add recent efforts at re-branding the city with images and forms supplied by globalisation. The flood levelled all these efforts to infuse metropolitan life with new dreamscapes. The Island City was reduced to what it almost was in the 16th century: islets on the Arabian Sea. If the postcolonial present had turned the colonial past to rubble, the flood had flattened the city itself. Commentators had long spoken of Mumbai as a dying city, suggesting a protracted, stretched-out descent into complete dysfunction. But the deluge came with a sudden force. History was speeded up. The mythic force of nature felled the myth of culture with one sharp blow.

When the water retreated and Mumbai re-emerged, there was debris all around. Amidst it was the aspiration of the city as modern society. It was roughed up and tattered, but miraculously it still breathed. The streets lurched back to life, buses, trains and taxis began moving again, shops reopened for business, the stock exchange and offices resumed operation, students returned to schools and colleges, cameras rolled in film studios, and the air was filled with a vigorous conversation about the city's future and celebrations of the "Mumbai spirit".

The dialectic of spectacle and ruin is common to all cities, but its unique intensity in Mumbai is evident even in the best of times; the contrast and the co-existence of the shining and the shabby in the Island City are legendary. But the deluge shook the dialectic with a volatile force. The Island City had died and sprung back to life so suddenly, the darkness and glow of urban experience had come together in a single frame in such rapid succession, that something more elemental came into view; the city's history as a catastrophe. Suddenly, its origins as a colonial project, the violence of the dream of mastery, came to the fore. What ordinarily appeared as the other side of progress, as the darkness that would eventually be lit bright by development, leapt into sight as the truth of its history. The much greater and enduring devastation in New Orleans provoked a discourse about race and social justice, overwhelming the voices that had raised concerns about the vulnerability of a city located below the sea level. In Mumbai, on the other hand, the flood put modernity itself into question. Even as Mumbai slowly rose above the water

again, the darkness in the air could not but remind us of its perilous basis, the quicksand upon which its promise rested.

The last word must go to the balladeer, who escalates the remembrance of an urban disaster into a dark warning about the nightmare of modern technological mastery:

*Aadmi aaj chaand par bhi safar kar rahaa
Maut par jor lekin kisi ka nahin
Nazar jo aa rahaa kal ki ye jhaanki hai
Namuna hai abhi ye aage bahut baaki hai
Khada hai aaj vishwa chunauti ke muhaane pe
Tula hai insaan hi insaaneyat mitaane par
Bana ke bamb yahan kuchch log bahut phool rahen
Prakriti ke shakti ko sab log jaise bhool rahen...*

Man can travel to the moon
But no one controls death
What appears today is a glimpse of tomorrow
Only a taste of what is to come
The world teeters on the precipice
Humans seem bent on killing humanity
Bombs fill some with pride
But we forget the power of nature...

NOTES

1. *Museebat mein Mumbai* (Mumbai in Distress). Krunal Music Company, 2005, Mumbai.
2. Marshall Berman. *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (Penguin Books, 1988, New York).

Waterline

LEGIER BIEDERMAN

All cities of the North, East and West have yielded up some restless souls to the far-off Southern city, whose spell is so mystic, so sweet, so universal. And to these wondering and wandering ones, this sleepy, beautiful, quaint old city murmurs: "Rest with me. I am old; but thou hast never met with a younger more beautiful than I. I dwell in eternal summer; I dwell in perennial sunshine; I sleep in magical moonlight. My streets are flecked with strange sharp shadows; and sometimes also the Shadow of Death falleth upon them; but if thou wilt not fear, thou art safe, My charms are not the charms of much gold and great riches; but thou mayst feel with me such hope and content as thou hast never felt before. I offer thee eternal summer, and a sky divinely blue, sweet breezes and sweet perfumes, bright fruits, and flowers fairer than the rainbow. Rest with me. For if thou leavest me, thou must forever remember me with regret". And assuredly those who wander from her may never cease to behold in their dreams ; quaint, beautiful and sunny as of old ; and to feel at long intervals the return of the first charm, the first delicious fascination of the fairest city of the South.

; Lafcadio Hearn, 1878



Eight Months Later

How do I begin to physically go back to New Orleans? In my thoughts, I've already returned a thousand times. How could I imagine, anticipate, and experience New Orleans' turbulent present and tumultuous future, and again remember it today? Though I grew up in a small town in Arkansas, in many ways I've always thought of New Orleans as home; a home that is continually reinvented and imagined; one that is full of contradictions and my ambivalences about longing and belonging. My family is from New Orleans, and I spent many months of my childhood, including most holidays, there; I lived there from 1995-2002. Since then, I've bounced around between London, Vancouver, Los Angeles and San Francisco, always dreaming of one day returning 'home'. But after 29 August 2005, everything I'd taken as a given about New Orleans; from Domelici's po-boys and Panadora's snow balls to the unbearably humid, romantic summer nights and the slow pace of the city, to New Orleanians' hospitable demeanours and greetings and hand waves from strangers on their front porch; was, like the waters that inundated the city, swiftly and violently thrown into question.

On 28 August 2005, after the bus and train stations had already closed, and fuel and rental cars were on short demand, a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans was ordered. As thousands (who had access to cars) left *en masse*, the interstate traffic halted to a standstill for hours as hotels and shelters in the region quickly became full. But thousands, who had been forgotten so many times before, were not included in the mandatory evacuation plan for the long predicted¹ and disastrous hurricane. The poor, the elderly, the disenfranchised, were once again left to fend for themselves. Over 25,000 people sought shelter in the New Orleans Superdome, as others waited the storm out in their homes.

Katrina was a Category 3 hurricane with 125 mph (205 km/h) winds that extended outward 120 miles (190 km) when it made landfall the morning of 29 August 2005. As Katrina's final gusts blew across New Orleans late that Monday afternoon, and as the skies cleared, dead pigeons, uprooted trees and shattered streetlamps and windows littered the streets. It was announced that New Orleans had escaped the feared 'worst case scenario'. But little did anyone know that the true aftermath of the disaster was shortly to come. The heavy winds and pressure from the storm surge, which ranged from 12 to 37 ft (3.7 to 11.3

metres) along the coastline, produced multiple breaches in the levee along the Industrial Canal,² and water forcefully inundated the city's Lower 9th Ward. The water deposited a large river barge in the neighbourhood bordering the levee; trees were uprooted, as well as entire homes. Those that remained were left standing in over 10 ft (3 metres) of water. The Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MR-GO or Mr Go) levee was breached in approximately 20 places, flooding New Orleans East,



most of Saint Bernard Parish and the East Bank of Plaquemines Parish. In other areas of the city, a quarter-mile section of the 17th Street Canal and multiple smaller sections of the London Avenue Canal broke, flooding the Lakeview and Gentilly areas.³ At 8:30 pm, all pumping stations, which are used to pump water out of the city, were non-functioning. By sunrise the following day, 80% of the city was flooded.

Two days later the enormity of the disaster was clear, yet little to no aid had arrived. A steady stream of pedestrians seeking food, water and shelter walked along Interstate 10, which was now devoid of the cars that had been gridlocked just hours earlier. Thousands in the squalid and chaotic conditions at the Superdome and the Convention Centre were running out of food, and had no water and no electricity. They were terrified, and worried about their family members whose whereabouts were still unknown. Many, fearing for their lives, had climbed onto rooftops as waters rose; others had drowned in their attics while trying to get to their rooftops. Many swam through water bubbling with natural gas and filled with sewage and toxic chemicals; with no way to help, many witnessed their loved ones and strangers die. Without food or water for days, Orleans Parish prisoners were left inside their cells as the flood waters rose inside, and patients with serious conditions were trapped in flooded hospitals. The repeatedly-promised buses of food, water and rescue equipment, allegedly on the way, took days to finally arrive. By 4 September, 42,000 people had been evacuated from New Orleans, including those remaining in the Superdome and Convention Centre.

It's often said that the turbulence caused by disasters comes in two waves. First comes the turbulence of the storm; and then the recriminations and the political conflicts that ensue, as well as the physical and psychological recovery. The flooding in New Orleans washed away the civil façade of society and rendered visible the power structures, the injustices, the corruption and the unacknowledged inequalities that lay beneath.

Since last September, I had wanted more than anything to go back to New Orleans, but somehow managed to put it off for months. Would the New Orleans I loved still be there, when the residents who made its culture feel like my home were scattered everywhere? Most of my friends from the city were displaced throughout the US, and for one reason or another were having a hard time going back. I had to go now; I couldn't go on as though New Orleans was already dead, which is the way that the few news reports trickling in, that still focus on New Orleans, portray it.

On the night of 12 April 2006, my partner Dagan (who I met eight years ago when we were both living in New Orleans) and I arrived in Houston for a short visit with Jamyron. He's 11 years old. Jamyron and his grandmother, Ms Iris, had been my neighbors in New Orleans. After Katrina they, along with 15,000 other evacuees, were bussed to the Houston



Astrodome, which provided an immediate shelter. From there, Jamyron and Ms Iris went to northern Louisiana, then Atlanta, and last December they were finally able to return to New Orleans. But shortly after returning, Ms Iris suffered a fatal stroke; Jamyron moved to Houston to live with Laquna, his 22-year-old sister, her son, and her boyfriend DeNiro, all of whom were from East New Orleans and had been living in southwest Houston since Katrina. They plan on staying there, though it's apparent that it's not their favourite place. They miss the everyday things about being in New Orleans. Jamyron misses his friends and shrimp sandwiches. Laquna misses the shade in New Orleans and has noticed, especially as summer approaches, the lack of trees in Houston. DeNiro says things happen for a reason; "there was too much violence, too many bad things happening in New Orleans, and Katrina is a wakeup call to chill out".

Jamyron's high spirits and kind, gentle heart continue to amaze me. But, how will he, and all the other children that experienced Katrina, deal with the stress of knowing too much about the world and yet simultaneously the anxiety of knowing too little? In the past few months I've witnessed him grow wise beyond his years, which is terrifying at times, though I hope it's potentially a blessing.

We rented a car in Houston, and after six hours driving through beautiful, low-lying swampy land, punctured by oil refineries and industrial complexes (this stretch along the Mississippi River has been termed 'cancer alley'), we were in New Orleans. Our anticipation, anxiety and trepidation were unmistakably manifest. As tears began to roll down Dagan's cheeks, I tried to hold mine back and grasped his hand with my sweaty palms. The vista of destruction was overwhelming; the stillness was uncanny, and our silence deafening. We traversed the city, through Kenner, Gert Town, Central City, the Garden District, the Irish Channel (where I once lived), through the Central Business District, down N. Rampart Street, through the Tremé past Louis Armstrong Park and the Iberville housing projects, to the 7th Ward, where we were staying with our old friends Rachel Breunlin and Dan Etheridge.

A Deluge of Urban Uncertainty

Traffic was exceedingly light, and every street sign was slightly, sometimes dramatically,

leaning to the side. The majority of the city's streetlights no longer work. At the busiest intersections, they've been temporarily (?) replaced with stop signs, while at others it's a free-for-all. Many of the bus shelters, for a practically non-existent public transportation system, exist as skeletal frameworks or no longer at all, while the streetcar tracks along St. Charles lie unused. The intersection of Magnolia and Feret, like many others, is a surreal mélange of political propaganda



for the 23 candidates in the 23 April city mayoral election,⁴ discarded refuse and contaminated remnants of past livelihoods. For the most part, the schools were empty, no kids on the playgrounds or lingering on the front steps, and the hospitals seemed alarmingly frozen in time.⁵ Many neighbourhoods are marked by a lack of inhabitants ; motionless and eerily silent ; while structurally they look peculiarly normal, except for the ghostly waterline on each home that symbolically tells a story of the past eight months in the lives of those that lived there, as well as their possible futures.⁶ In most neighbourhoods, except the hardest-hit, uninviting white FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) trailers populate front lawns and driveways; and in many unused parking lots entire FEMA trailer 'neighbourhoods', with security guards, have been set up.⁷

Located a block-and-a-half off Esplanade Ave, which is built on a ridge that was formed thousands of years ago by the flooding of the Mississippi River, Rachel and Dan's house narrowly missed being destroyed. As the waterline on their front steps indicates, had the water been six inches higher, their home would have been uninhabitable. But the houses only a block-and-a-half further away from Esplanade hadn't been as lucky. Because there had been infrequent, if any, trash collection for the past few months, residents temporarily transformed the vacant corner lot at the end of the block into a dump. Its stench is suffocating and permeates the heavy, humid New Orleans' night air.

The 7th Ward neighbourhood is quiet, though residents on their block are slowly returning. As Rachel, Dagan and I were talking on the front porch, sweet Mr Henderson, an elderly resident of N. Miro Street (just two blocks from Rachel and Dan's), came slowly walking around the corner for the first time in over eight months. Rachel and Mr Henderson's eyes filled with tears of joy as they hugged one another. Over the years, Rachel and Dan had grown very close with Mr and Mrs Henderson. For months they had worried about these neighbours. Before the storm, they frequently dropped by each other's houses for visits; and on a regular basis Mr Henderson, an avid reader, brought Rachel a huge stack of journals and magazines that he had read. But like so many others, they never bothered exchanging contact information. None of the neighbours, who had returned, knew the Hendersons' whereabouts. They had all been worried, especially since the storm took such an immediate, as well as prolonged, toll on the elderly. But the Hendersons were all right, and they were coming home.

We spent that Sunday with my parents and picnicked in Audubon Park, which is in an area of the city that sustained very little damage. While the sun was noticeably more intense because the winds from Katrina had knocked down many of the huge live oak trees and thinned the branches of those still standing, everything else was exceptionally routine



for a spring day in the park: families picnicking, kids playing games, cars with shiny rims cruising the road along the periphery of the park. Monday we were in the Lower 9th Ward,⁸ and that was a different story. While we were there, two bodies were found buried beneath what used to be a home, raising to 17 the number of Hurricane Katrina fatalities discovered in New Orleans in the past month-and-a-half.⁹ In the Lower 9th Ward, where prior to Katrina approximately 14,000 people lived and 4,820 homes stood, there were no businesses operating, no schools in session, no electricity, no FEMA trailers, and no running water. Blocks of houses were wiped away and are now flat, except for the occasional concrete slab still standing; a ghostly trace of a previous home; and the overturned cars that were littered about as the water receded. But the area is full of activity: crews recovering bodies and reconstructing the industrial canal levee that broke, and volunteers helping residents recover and rebuild.

In the throes of crisis, how can we grasp the surges and waves in ideas and practices as they crash against the shoreline?

I could see a multiplicity of intense emotions; anger, confusion and fatigue alongside warmth, devotion and fervour; in the eyes of everyone I encountered in the city, my former teachers, my friends Rachel and Dan, their neighbours, Mr. Henderson. Their eyes were weary and their exhaustion was unmistakable, and yet at the same moment, their energy and passion was palpable.

Lower 9th Ward residents, who have had no public schools open since Katrina, took it upon themselves to rebuild their neighborhood school, Martin Luther King, Jr. (which had taken in 10 feet of water), as the authorities refused to do so. With the help of non-profit and volunteer groups such as Common Ground Relief Collective,¹⁰ residents began gutting mouldy parts, repairing and repainting the school, until, for unknown reasons, the State Superintendent of Education called the police and halted the work. After days of public outcry and support from city residents and volunteers, the state backed off and work resumed, creating a place for education in the neighborhood, a space for community as well as a symbol of resistance.



In August 2005, there were 7,381 public housing apartments in New Orleans; and now, maybe 700^a. Residents returning to their public housing apartments are being told that by abandoning them, they forfeited them. (So now, forcibly closed for months equals abandonment...?) Since Katrina, New Orleans public housing developments have been closed by locked metal shutters and doors and surrounded by chain-link fences. Mildred Battle, who is

70 and gets around in a wheelchair, was one member of the more than 1000 families displaced from the St. Bernard Housing Development. Despite returning three times, Mildred Battle was never allowed to enter, nor retrieve her belongings. This month dozens of residents illegally entered the gate in the chain-link fence, passed the lone security guard and entered their homes. Miss Battle was among them, and friends helped her retrieve family photos, including a picture of her deceased son, and a Martin Luther King award she received in the 1990s. She and the other residents, along with veteran public housing organisers and activists from N.O.H.E.A.T. (New Orleans Housing Emergency Action Team) and C3 (Community, Concern and Compassion),¹¹ vow to enforce the rights of public housing residents to return home. They indicate there will be more direct actions.

How do we begin to tell stories and record experiences in the wake of turbulence, so as to evoke all that is as yet unborn?

Our friend Rachel, along with Abram Himelstein, both high school teachers at John McDonogh Senior High school before Katrina, co-founded a community documentary programme in New Orleans called The Neighbourhood Story Project: Our Stories Told by Us.¹² Rachel and Abram wanted to bridge the gap between the high school and the community. In June 2005, they published five books by students from John McDonogh that looked at the city from vantage points not typically discussed, those that are usually left out of official histories. Through creative non-fiction, photography and interviews with community members, each author creates detailed portraits of their communities that often change the way that we (or at least I) see the familiar, as well as deepen our understanding of New Orleans in particular and notions of community in general.

Ashley Nelson is 18 years old and the author of *The Combination*, one of the books published by the Neighbourhood Story Project. It is a book about her life in a public housing project and the closeness of her community. After Katrina, she and her family stayed in Houston for a while, but have since returned to New Orleans. Ashley, who is currently working as a research assistant for the Neighbourhood Story Project, says about life after Katrina:

³What happens when you lose your city? The place you grew up, the place where every memory you recall is located; how the hell are you supposed to recover from that? All the FEMA money in the world can't help rebuild the lost families, relationships, neighbourhoods caused by the storm. It's hard not to worry that Katrina will be the end of the New Orleans I know, when there are big metal covers locking the windows and doors of Lafitte; huge signs reading "No



Trespassing". It hurts me to ride by and not see kids playing in the courtyard or card games taking place on Christy's porch in the Tonti, or to hear the driveway boys having a ribbin session in da cut. I want to be in New Orleans and have it feel like home. I want to walk outside the door on 2202 Orleans Avenue and see three o'clock traffic. I want to wake up on Mardi Gras day and see the Zulu pass on Orleans and Galvez. I want to walk through the court and hear someone say, "Ay, you Jalna's daughter", or walk over to Busy Bee's and hear Mike say, "Ya heard me"² But I don't want people to have to deal with the old New Orleans where the police harass or hurt us cuz they think we look suspicious, or where trained police kill someone because they have a knife. Or where people feel cheated by our government, and elected officials still make racial comments, and we have to send our children back to the worst schools in the state. I want HANO [Housing Authority of New Orleans] to reopen the doors of my neighbourhood, but I don't want the world to believe we are looters and thieves. I don't want people to believe that my home is dangerous because they are from a simpler place. And I don't want people to think we're deficient just cuz we ain't got no money. I don't want people to judge us without hearing our stories.

Since Katrina, the Neighbourhood Story Project has been working on a book project with the members of the Nine Times Social Aid and Pleasure Club,¹³ one of the first official 'second line' clubs from the 9th Ward that got off the ground. When the Nine Times paraded for the first time, Evella "Ms. Coochie" Pierre, the 2004 Queen of Nine Times, recalls, "They all cried because a lot of people said they wasn't going to make it. They weren't going to parade. But they did"¹⁴. The Nine Times is from the Desire housing project, which was built in the segregated 1950s as a black development; it was one of the largest public housing developments in the country, and home to the New Orleans chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1970s.¹⁵ Ever since Desire was torn down in the 1990s, the annual Nine Times second line,¹⁶ which everyone prepares for all year long, has served a crucial community function. Lady Nine Times President Charlene Mathews says:

The Nine Times second line is like a reunion for residents. You get to see people you haven't

seen in awhile. At second lines you get to say: "Oh, girl, I haven't seen you in a long, long time. How your mama and them?" And everybody is greeting everybody. It's a tradition that's still going on, but a lot of people was afraid to come forward to it. Today, they're not afraid, and they come out there. People come out there and they dance and have a good time.¹⁷



Every Monday night for the past six months, Nine Times members, exhausted

from work and from dealing with Katrina's aftermath, have come together to work on their book project, which is not just a history of the Club, but also a story of community, struggle and love.

Recently the Neighbourhood Story Project has been working with The Porch, a cultural organisation in the 7th Ward that works to sustain and foster exchange among the cultures of the neighbourhood, city and region. Together they've created '7th Ward Speaks', a series of posters, each containing interviews with and stories about the life of a 7th Ward resident. The posters are being put up throughout the city and distributed at the upcoming Original Big Seven second line parade. The poster project is an attempt to encourage dialogue among community members about life both before and after the storm, and raise awareness about the 7th Ward outside the neighbourhood. The initial 12 community members interviewed are now interviewing other members of the community for the next series of posters, a process that will hopefully keep multiplying, creating and expanding dialogue and friendships.

Ed Buckner, who works as a baker, a preschool administrator, a football coach and president of the Original Big Seven Social and Pleasure Club, says on his poster:

It's the Big Seven Social and Pleasure Club and it's the whole, entire 7th Ward. The club gives the neighborhood a community day. This is y'all's parade. We try to have a family day and we want everybody to be a part of what we do. I don't believe nobody deserves my parade no more than my people in the 7th Ward. You can really cut a rug doing this. The crowd jumping. The band's jumping. You can tell when the band's having a good day because the crowd will be workin' it out. You'll be rollin'. This is exactly what it's all about. This is the area. This is the culture.¹⁸

Day by day and moment by moment, New Orleans residents are embracing the surges and waves in ideas and practices as they crash. The city of New Orleans is learning to live again, anew, with the weight of knowing too much about the world and at the same time, the fear of knowing too little. In neighbourhoods where residents may not have known each other, suddenly they've found each other, and started organising themselves for mutual aid and security; demanding that their vision for how their neighbourhoods, their community, their city, be rebuilt; be not only heard, but listened to. Since Katrina, New Orleans residents, who are themselves stretched so very thin, are coming together, sharing resources with one another, caring for one another - it's the New Orleans way, as Rachel says. They are not just rebuilding their own house or their own neighbourhood, but re-imagining notions of community and



renewing and remaking relationships that have been scattered all over the place. Beneath the violence of its current devastation, of urban catastrophe, a city survives that still has a tight grasp on the hearts of many, a beautiful city on the Mississippi, an island of hope in a turbulent time.

NOTES

1. Predictions of previous years have proved to be eerily accurate. See Mark Fischetti, "Drowning New Orleans", *Scientific American*, October 2001. See also Sheila Grissett, "Shifting federal budget erodes protection from levees: Because of cuts, hurricane risk grows", *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 8 June 2004.
2. The Industrial Canal, which is a 5.5 mile (9 km) navigable waterway that connects the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain, is the name used by locals to refer to what is officially known as the Inner Harbour Navigation Canal (IHNC). It has slips and docks along its length, which allow it to function as a harbour in addition to a transit canal. In the 1960s, the Industrial Canal junction width was expanded, becoming an intersection with the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (commonly referred to as MR-GO or Mr GO). Shortly after its expansion, a levee breach in the Industrial Canal resulted in catastrophic flooding of the Lower 9th Ward during Hurricane Betsy in 1965. MRGO is a 66-mile (106 km) ship channel that connects the Port of New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico in a route as straight as an engineer's ruler. The MR-GO began as a bad idea to promote economic growth on the Port; at the behest of many, the Corps initiated construction in the late 1950s. Boosters for the Port claimed that the MR-GO would encourage an 'industrial renaissance', but these grand ambitions never materialised. Although it cuts 40 miles off the trip by traversing the marshes of St. Bernard Parish, the only growth that has occurred is in the size of the canal itself. It expanded from its original width of 500 feet to 2500 feet (152.4 to 762 metres) in some places due to erosion of the canal's banks caused by the wake of giant ships. The MR-GO, along with other flood control methods such as levees and pumps (not to be confused with flood mitigation, which largely consists of coastal restoration) have resulted in the destruction of much of the wetlands surrounding New Orleans, exacerbating the city's susceptibility to floods. Historically, the wetlands surrounding the city provided invaluable flood protection by acting as a sponge to soak up the menace of storm surge, but in the last century, over 1.2 million acres of Louisiana's land have disappeared. Now the open water, which sits where land once stood, provides fuel to the fury of hurricanes. Critics attributed over 40,000 acres of wetland loss to the MR-GO alone. It has been called a "marsh-eating monster" and described as a "hurricane superhighway" that would exacerbate the risk of deadly floods.



3. The 17th Street Canal and the London Avenue Canal carry drainage water that is pumped out of the city to Lake Pontchartrain.

4. Only 36% of registered voters participated in the 23 April mayoral election, which Louisiana state officials, human rights groups and the press have billed as "the most important election in the history of New Orleans". Continuous appeals for satellite voting boxes, which were set up throughout the US in past elections for Iraqis, Afghans, Haitians and many others, were denied. Predictably, turnout was high in the mostly prosperous and white areas where little damage occurred, and exceptionally low; in some, only 15% voter participation; in the

- heavily damaged areas of the New Orleans East, Gentilly and the Ninth Ward. The systematic exclusion of the displaced has given fuel to those who do not want the poor to return. Indeed, low turnout in poor neighbourhoods where the majority of residents are displaced, such as the 9th Ward, is being taken as an indication of lack of interest and as an excuse to further silence their voices. As the *Washington Post* reported: "How many people turned out to vote in each precinct was being viewed as an indicator of which neighbourhoods are likely to be rebuilt; in many abandoned neighbourhoods, people fear that residents who have left for good would not vote, revealing their lack of interest in the neighbourhood and the city. Turnout could offer clues to the future racial makeup of the city". See Peter Whoriskey, "Nagin, Landrieu to Run Off for Mayor of New Orleans", *The Washington Post*, 23 April 2006. See also Brian Thevenot, "Flood-ravaged neighborhoods may lose clout: Voter turnout in most of them plummets in mayoral primary", *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 2 May 2006.
5. New Orleans has lost 77% of its primary care doctors, 70% of its dentists, 89% of its psychiatrists; its only public healthcare facility, Charity Hospital, is closed. 'On The Edge | The Louisiana Child & Family Health Study', a survey conducted by Operation Assist (a collaboration between Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and The Children's Health Fund) surveyed hundreds of the thousands of families living in FEMA trailers in Louisiana. Nearly half of the parents surveyed reported that at least one of their children was manifesting emotional or behavioural difficulties that had not been present prior to Katrina. More than half the women caregivers showed evidence of clinically-diagnosed psychiatric problems. On average, households have moved 3.5 times since the hurricane, some as many as nine times, often across state lines. More than one-fifth of children displaced were either not in school, or had missed 10 or more days of school in the past month, while many children in New Orleans are not in school at all (<http://www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu/news/ncdp-hurricane-study.html>). Before Katrina, 60,000 students attended over 115 New Orleans public schools; only 12,000 students attend the 25 open public schools today. However, most of the public schools are now privately operated public charter schools, while only 4 of the 25 public schools are operated by the elected school board. See Sharon Cohen, "Overhaul of New Orleans' troubled public schools called Katrina's 'silver lining'", the Associated Press *State & Local Wire*, 2 March 2006.
 6. Before Katrina, 484,674 people inhabited the city; eight months later, this number is approximately 181,000, which includes both returnees and new workers to the city. Over 300,000 people are still displaced. In the past 30 days, the first of thousands of homes destroyed by Katrina have finally started being demolished in Orleans Parish, but little or no progress has been made in rebuilding many key components of the infrastructure. In Houston, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issued 25,000 eviction notices to evacuees, who FEMA had previously given one year of housing and utilities vouchers. They have now been told by FEMA that they are no longer eligible for help, and must either pay the rent or leave. (See Gary Younge, "Big business sees a chance for ethnic and class cleansing", *The London Guardian*, 20 April 2006). Yet not a penny of the billions of federal housing reconstruction money from the Community Development Block Grant has made it to New Orleans. The City of New Orleans has on its website (www.cityofno.com) recently begun publishing 30-day home demolition notification lists, which totals 2,100 homes. Moreover, despite the fact that half the population of New



- Orleans lived in rental housing, and that 84,000 rental units were destroyed or damaged, only 6,000 low-income rental units are part of the state plan for reconstruction. See Melinda Deslatte, "Advocates say Rental Housing lacking in Blanco's Plans", Associated Press, *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 17 April 2006.
7. FEMA initially refused to say how much the government is paying for the 240-square-foot trailers that have a 'life cycle' of 18 months. However after the *New York Times* and *New Orleans Times Picayune* estimates placed the cost at over \$60,000 each, FEMA eventually acknowledged the accuracy of their estimate ; an amount that is well over the cost of repairs to most homes in New Orleans. See James Varney, "Trailer Cash", *New Orleans Times Picayune*, 21 January 2006. While thousands of New Orleanians continue to live in hotel rooms, FEMA trailers and wrecked homes, the estimated 20,000 migrant workers who have ventured to the city for the clean-up spend their nights in primitive conditions in parts of City Park, which is charging rent to the campers; in many cases, they are living in the mouldy houses they are gutting. Recently compiled accounts from numerous migrant workers describe this labour exploitation. Varied tiers of subcontractors and 'labour agents' stand between them and their American employers, who take advantage of the illegality of their work force. The *Washington Post* recently asked: "How many contractors does it take to patch a leaky roof?" They concluded five contractors, or even six. At the bottom tier is a Spanish-speaking crew earning less than 10 cents for each square foot of blue tarp installed. At the top, the prime contractor bills the government 15 times as much for the same job. In instances reviewed by the *Washington Post*, the difference between the job's actual price and the fee charged to taxpayers ranged from 40% to as high as 1,700%. See Joby Warrick, "Multiple Layers Of Contractors Drive Up Cost of Katrina Cleanup", *The Washington Post*, 20 March 2006.
 8. The Lower 9th Ward, an area of the city first settled by African American families after their emancipation from slavery, has one of the highest rates (60%) of African American homeownership in the US. Over 54% of residents in this neighbourhood have lived there for at least 25 years, reflecting residents' longstanding and deep roots in the community.
 9. Eight months after 80% of the city flooded, 987 people are still missing, while Katrina is now directly blamed for the deaths of 1,282 Louisiana residents.
 10. Established in the first week after Katrina, Common Ground Collective is a community-initiated volunteer organisation. The Collective supplied immediate, short-term relief for victims of the hurricane in the Gulf Coast region, and is providing long-term support in rebuilding the communities affected in the New Orleans area. www.commongroundrelief.org
 11. N.O.H.E.A.T. (www.no-heat.org) is a local activist alliance dedicated to resisting the mass evictions of poor and working-class residents, and to fighting the illegal dismantling of New Orleans public housing. C3 (www.c3nola.org) is a local anti-war, grassroots community organisation that advocates affordable housing

as a human right and holds the government accountable for securing that right. Both groups demand that the processes of rebuilding New Orleans include all its citizens.

12. Along with the everyday problems of a hard-pressed community, in April 2003 the students and faculty at John McDonogh Senior High went through a major trauma: a gunman wielding an AK-47 and a handgun fired more than 30 shots into the packed school gym, killing one student and wounding three others. The media treated the incident as a gangland retaliation story, which tainted the entire community. Part of the reason that Rachel and Abram started the Neighbourhood



Story Project was because of the incredible frustration experienced by being brought into the national spotlight for something negative, and the consequent stereotype that it created about the school. They wanted the students and the community to be able to tell their own stories, as there was so much more happening in their neighbourhoods and at their school. Because John McDonogh has been closed since Katrina, the Neighborhood Story Project is relocating to a storefront space in the 7th Ward. www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org

13. The Social Aid and Pleasure Club tradition began in the late 19th century in African American communities in New Orleans. Its roots are in the Freedmen's Aid Association, founded in 1856 after the Civil War. The Association's goal was to provide loans, assistance, and a means of education to newly freed slaves. After the Association's demise, benevolent organisations arose within New Orleans neighbourhoods to function as mutual aid societies. The Social Aid Clubs of the early 20th century provided aid to fellow African Americans, and ensured that club members were provided a proper burial. For the poor black residents of New Orleans, the clubs became a social safety net. Clubs celebrate their anniversary with a 'second line'. These participatory parades begin with a brass band, the club members, and a core group of their supporters, but will grow throughout the four-hour parade to crowds ranging anywhere from 1,000 - 8,000. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs serve as a mechanism for community self-reliance, which is currently very significant as lowland neighbourhoods that fail to redevelop sufficiently will most likely shrink or disappear. The restoration of these cultural institutions is key to the re-emergence of a culturally bonded way of life in impoverished New Orleans neighbourhoods (see note 16).
14. From Waukesha Jackson's interview with Evella "Ms. Coochie" Pierre. See Waukesha Jackson, *What Would the World Be without Women: Stories from the 9th Ward*, one of five books published by the Neighbourhood Story Project in 2005.
15. By the fall of 1970, the Black Panther movement had developed a major presence in the Desire housing development, where that group provided a stabilising force to a neighbourhood that had largely been disregarded by police. Panthers provided food and security to impoverished Desire residents and successfully recruited many community members to their revolutionary cause. As their tenure in Desire grew, so did the unease; police and Panthers had run-ins, including one shootout that September. In November 1970, the conflict came to a head. There was a tense standoff that erupted in violence between the police and the Panthers and residents who supported them. It resulted in the arrest of six Panther members and the death of one, Betty Toussaint. Common Ground Collective co-founder Malik Rahim was one of the Panthers arrested.
16. The Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs are the keepers of the 'second line' tradition (see note 13). The second line is a parade historically associated with jazz funerals; the term 'second line' is often thought originally to have referred to the fans, admirers and revellers following the casket behind the band and the family. 'Second line' is also used to refer to the distinctive dance moves in these street parades. During the early 20th century, the New Orleans second line served an important community function. At that time African Americans were not allowed to buy insurance, so they formed mutual aid societies, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs to help members through tough times. When a member's house burned down, or when someone died and their family lacked the funds for a proper funeral, the club would step in to help. Live bands and second-lining became integral parts of the fund-raising efforts.
17. From Waukesha Jackson's interview with Lady Nine Times President, Charlene Mathews. See Waukesha Jackson (2005), op. cit.
18. The interview was conducted at Ed's stoop by Ashley Nelson, Rachel Breunlin and Helen Regis on 7 March 2006.

Waves of Wrath

R.V. RAMANI

On 25 December 2004, I arrived at Nagercoil to attend a family function at the house of Tamil writer Sundara Ramaswamy. On the 26th, I went sightseeing to Kanyakumari, just a 30-minute drive away, with the family of Akhila, a friend also visiting from Chennai. The car was full: Akhila, her two children (a six-year-old boy and a two-year-old girl), Akhila's parents, both in their late fifties, and our driver.

When we reached Kanyakumari beach, we found the sea turbulent. We had already got news of the rough seas in Chennai, so we decided to leave for Nagercoil. On the way, our driver took a small detour to Suthavali beach. Here the sea seemed calm, the water had receded and it looked like low tide. People told us the sea had been "misbehaving" since the morning, with the water erratically ebbing and flowing. We spent about five minutes there, and just as we were about to leave, we saw a wave forming on the horizon.

The wave rose higher and higher ; at first, it was a fantastic sight. I heard someone shouting, "Look, it's a miracle, you can never see such a spectacle again!" I started filming it on my video camera. The wave was one huge wall, strong, dark and menacing, casting its own shadows. Frothing and fuming, it was advancing towards the shore at very high speed. It soon became apparent that we would have no chance to escape.

(We later found out that the speed of a tsunami wave is about 800 kilometres per hour, the speed of an aircraft!)

We ran. Our car was parked about 20 feet behind us. Actually, since the road is much higher than the beach, even at high tide, the waters do not normally reach it. But this wave was different; the height of this tidal wave was almost that of a two-storey building. Before

we could reach the car, the wave hit us square. The driver had already got in, while my friend's family was sheltering just behind the vehicle. And I ran to hide behind the car too.

The wave lashed at us, and tossed the car into the air. All at once, we were drowning and being dragged half a kilometre over a rough surface, crashing through coconut groves, trees, bushes, ditches, rocks, walls^a I kept repeating only two things to myself: hold your breath, and don't let go of the camera. Just when I felt I couldn't hold my breath any longer, the water began to recede. I grabbed a pole and a broken tree to stop myself from getting dragged back out with it.

To my amazement, I realised I hadn't suffered any major injuries. I got up slowly, dazed, and reeling with disbelief. My camera still remained firm in the palm of my right hand. I clambered onto a hillock nearby and saw three or four more men surfacing and walking about slowly. We could hear moans, cries for help from different directions. The whole place looked devastated; there was water everywhere. Many people were trapped in ditches, seriously injured. Many others had broken legs and arms. Everyone's clothes had been ripped off. We managed to lift five or six people out of the water and placed them on a higher spot behind a tree. I told them to hold on to the tree in case the water surged again.

And then I started looking for my friend's family. There were dead bodies scattered all around me. I found our car about 100 metres from the road, crushed inside the coconut grove. The driver was lying dead inside. After much searching, I found Akhila, dead in a small pool of water, her right hand ripped off. There was panic in the air and people were shouting at us to leave the place, as there was a chance of another wave hitting the shore. I reached the village on the other side, away from the sea, walking through hip-deep water. Akhila's mother had survived too, and she was walking towards the village, dazed, bleeding from her legs and hands. Along with Akhila's mother and many more injured people, I was rushed to a nearby hospital for first-aid.

Later, when we reached Sundara Ramaswamy's house in Nagercoil, we found out that Akhila's son had survived and was in a hospital. By evening, Akhila's father had been found too, but in a serious condition. Both were fighting for life in the ICU. Many bodies had been brought to the morgue in Nagercoil, and we identified Akhila, her two-year-old daughter and our driver. More than 500 people in the area had perished from the wave.

I am writing this while still recovering from the shock, and am being treated for elbow and knee injuries. My friend Sundara Ramaswamy and his friend are taking care of me. Soon I will return to Chennai. My camera, a Sony PD 100, is broken, clogged with water and sand. I don't know if it can be repaired or if the footage can be salvaged. The images, hitherto unseen on television, would be heart-rending. But no more so than my memories.

This text was posted on 15 January 2005 by Anjali Monteiro to the Vikalp list, a discussion list of documentary filmmakers. <vikalp@yahooogroups.com>

Zalzala (Earthquake)!

KAVITA PAI

Subject: [Reader-list] *Zalzala* !

Date: 19 Oct 2005

From: kavita pai <kavitapai@rediffmail.com>

To: reader-list@sarai.net

It happened in Sopore. It happened as I was climbing onto the roof of the Sumo, reluctantly and against my better judgement, to shoot the funeral procession of the two girls killed in Friday's firing in Sopore.

Emotions were at fever pitch, and the mourning chants of the women were frequently drowned by the angry slogans of the men. Though sympathetic to their grief, I was afraid of rousing them further by pointing the camera at them. But they wanted to be heard and I couldn't refuse, so there I was, climbing onto the roof of the vehicle.

I'd barely managed to pull myself up when there were screams, and people started running helter skelter. Someone said, Firing! I thought, This is it, the army's opened fire on the procession and we're dead meat. Hastily I scrambled down.

The trees, the electricity poles, the houses, started swaying. It's the accumulated trauma of the past few minutes, I thought. I'm probably collapsing under the strain. It took me a few moments to realise that the ground beneath my feet was also shaking, and people were running not to take cover from army firing, but to escape nature's wrath^a. There was only one word on everyone's lips: *Zalzala, zalzala* (earthquake)!f

Slowly, other sounds started filtering in^a Voices around us urged us to sit down and stay calm. The chanting of the mourners resumed as if it had never stopped. All around us people were praying. From the heartrending cries of mothers pleading for justice, the prayers had now taken on the aspect of fear and awe at His wrath, and belief in His mercy. It was as if the quake was divine retribution for the thousands killed in the Valley over the past 15 years. It was His way of saying, I know, and I care^f.

And then I saw X, the maternal cousin of one of the girls killed, crouching with my two companions, reassuring them that they were safe, no harm would come to them. You are my sisters^f, he was telling them, and *Inshallah* (God willing), you'll be fine^f.

All of a sudden I wanted to be reassured too. At that moment it was as if my long-lost faith was re-ignited, not in God, but in His believers, X and others; who even in their grief had not forgotten the three frightened strangers in their midst; who despite the danger to their own life and limb were concerned about our well-being; who despite the bleak hopelessness of their existence, had found it in their hearts to pray for us and give us hope.

We'd arrived in Sopore only a few minutes ago, but it had begun to seem like a lifetime. We were three: I and my friend and colleague Hansa were there in connection with a documentary on Women and Conflict. Along with us was our young translator Safia, a local from Srinagar, for whom it was the first day of work.

Only the previous day we'd received news of the grenade blast in Sopore, followed by the firing in which the two girls were killed, among others. There was also talk of a *fidayeen* (suicide bombers) attack and an ongoing encounter with security personnel.

We reached Sopore in the early morning of the following day. Accidentally bumping into a recent acquaintance in the town square, we asked him about the incident. Yes, they were killed in crossfire^f, he said, drawing angry denials from local bystanders, who dared us to go to the house of the victims, to their *mohalla* (neighbourhood), if we really wanted to know the truth.

You want to go there? I'll take you there, ^f said a young man whose name I still do not know. Before we had time to think, X and his friends had jumped into our vehicle. She was his cousin, he said, killed on her way back from school. We'd like to meet her parents^f, we mumbled.

A little way from the house our vehicle was stopped; we proceeded on foot, followed by a quickly swelling crowd. One either side of me walked X and his friend, grim-faced but constantly reassuring us that we should not be afraid, we were safe in their hands. Having no choice, I strode alongside, staying as close to him as possible.

But no sooner had we reached the house than he spun around on his heels to face the crowd, and began shouting slogans for *azaadi* (independence), for freedom from the terrorising Indian state. His cries were met with answering shouts from the crowd, massed in the narrow lane and craning out of overhanging windows.

Hemmed in from all sides and feeling suddenly bereft, I kept my eyes on the ground, uncertain and nervous about what might happen next. But it was a momentary fear. No sooner had the crowd started to push and shove than X and his friends once again threw a protective cordon around us and slipped us in into the house.

The air was rent with the anguished wailing of women. Next to the coffin of one of the victims sat her mother, quietly weeping, while her father stood stoically to one side. In an

enclosure in the courtyard, the other victim was being bathed and dressed in preparation for her final journey. They were like peas in a pod ; Shehnaza and Ulfat ; of the same age, always together ; cousins, friends and lifelong companions^a Go and see for yourself, see what they've done to her^a Record it, so that the world knows what they do to us and our children^f.

I entered the tent and looked, just a glance, and then could look no more^a the ground seemed to give way beneath my feet and I could feel the camera slipping from my grasp. She was so young, half-woman, half-child; pretty, like the boisterous and cheerful students of Women's College in Srinagar; and innocent, like the vast majority of the casualties of conflict in Kashmir.

And now, she was just a statistic ; collateral damage of the bloody war waged by the world's largest democracy on her own people. And as a citizen of the sovereign secular socialist democratic republic of India, the guilt was mine. I was as culpable of her death as the bullets that brought her down, the fingers that carelessly pulled the trigger^a I was guilty through my refusal to see, to acknowledge the terrible truth of this most beautiful of graveyards.

Did you see the *mehendi* on her hands, Hansa asked me later. I hadn't, I hadn't noticed the henna pattern on her hands, she must have been to a wedding recently. I had just looked and then looked away, overcome with guilt. As my composure cracked, it fell to Hansa to calmly take the camera from my hands and shoot. Her predominant emotion then, she told me later, was rage ; rage which impelled her to put the horror, the shame and the sorrow of it on record, for all to see.

So she shot the mother bathing her young daughter ; stroking her beautiful, seemingly unscarred body, gently combing her hair and kissing her fingers.

She shot them while I fled to the courtyard and tried to tell her family that we really didn't need to shoot then, we could come back in a few days to record. I told myself we were intruding on their grief, that they might not be ready to talk about so fresh a wound. The reality was that I was not ready for it. I'd never before come face to face with such evil and such desperation.

Bathed and dressed, Shehnaza and Ulfat began their last journey through the winding narrow streets of their neighbourhood, followed by scores of angry and grieving mourners ; the women at the back, their faces creased with sorrow, the men in front, grieving too, yet thirsting for justice. Hansa, Safia and I scurried alongside, herded to the head of the funeral procession by one of the relatives. More people were going to join where the lane broadened out, and the family wanted us to shoot the procession there, from the second floor of a house.

As we reached the junction I looked around and up at the staring angry faces ranged on all sides, and again got that sinking feeling. Unsure of what might happen next ; even one stone pelted by a mischievous kid could give the situation a very ugly turn ; I looked for an escape route. It came in the form of X, who, probably taking pity on us, said I could get into our vehicle and shoot from there.

Just as I was breathing a sigh of relief, he thought it would be better still if I could get on to the roof of the Sumo ; he'd probably seen other media persons doing that. Anyway, I didn't know how to refuse, so I found myself half-climbing, half-hoisted on to the roof, and it was then that the earthquake struck and all hell broke loose.

It was as if the cries of the mourners had shaken the very foundations of the world and reached Allah, and this was His Judgement, His warning and punishment to a creation gone totally awry. But you will be safe, *Inshallah f*, X was telling my friends.

It was then that I reached out; reached out and took his hand in mine. And I was safe. It was as if he could protect me from the fury of the elements, as if his prayers and the collective prayers of all the mourners would shield us from everything.

After what seemed like a lifetime of fervent prayer, the tremors subsided. People got busy checking on family and neighbours, calling up the police and rushing the injured to hospital. X and his friends jumped again into our vehicle, this time carrying the limp body of a man with a gaping wound in the centre of his head. He didn't look as if he'd survive, but within moments we'd screeched up to the hospital gate, speeding through police and army cordons, the tension of the past 24 hours forgotten. Having entrusted the man to the doctors, X and his friends were out again, asking whether we'd like to go back and shoot the funeral procession. I demurred, and X said understandingly, You carry on, *haalaat kharaab hone waale hain* (things are going to get worse)^af

I didn't know what he meant - what could be worse than what had already happened?

We left, shaken; not so much from the earthquake, but from the bizarre timing of the tremors, and the significance it had taken in the minds of that small battered community. For the people of Sopore, it was divine retribution for the many sins that had been committed on this land; the blood of countless innocents had come back to haunt the earth. This sentiment was to be echoed again and again by people across Kashmir in the coming few days, with a slightly different twist. The earthquake was a signal of impending doom; for 15 years the people of the Valley had suffered, but their sorrows had only multiplied. The Quran says that there will come a day when evil will rule and there will be wars and disasters, *zulm* (atrocities) all around^a these are warning signs, the end of the world is nigh^f, said not one, but person after person we met.

At another time I don't know how I'd have reacted to such talk, but the reality of Kashmir is so strange that it probably becomes impossible to live without recourse to external explanations for phenomena, which can also go by the name of faith. We'd barely left Sopore and were on our way to Bandipore to meet another family when we were forced to turn around. The countryside was afire with rumours that a prominent leader, Iftekar Ansari, had been killed, and his supporters were out in force on the streets. Taking another route, we found that our way was blocked again. We decided to turn back and head towards Srinagar, only to find the same story repeated. With all routes cut off, and feeling well and truly trapped, we pulled off the road to consider our options; take refuge in a village, or try to brave the obstacles and push through.

Spotting a vehicle attempting to sneak through the cordon, we followed, telling our driver to move slowly and cautiously and on no account to stop. He was quite jittery from the time spent in Sopore; his taillights had been damaged, and now again his vehicle was at risk, if not his life. We, on the other hand, were confident that as women we would be accorded special treatment. If they didn't let us pass, at least they wouldn't harm us.

Needless to say, we went past not just that block but numerous others before reaching Srinagar safe and sound. I wonder when the women of Kashmir will be able to move about freely, with the same degree of confidence about their safety.

As we were leaving Sopore, a young boy had pointed out a similar contrast between their world and ours: Why is it that when one schoolboy is killed in a blast in Srinagar it makes newspaper headlines, whereas when scores of children are killed in broad daylight in Sopore and other places in the interior, we have no one to mourn for us? If this is the cost of education, I don't want to go to school, at least I'll stay alive^a I don't know about this *azaadi* business, I don't want *azaadi*^a But isn't it strange that I'm an Indian, and I'm being killed here everyday, and nobody's bothered?^f

As an Indian, I could only hang my head in shame. As a woman I could only wonder whether our worlds could ever meet; two young girls had died a senseless death less than 24 hours ago, while we were alive and well, in large measure due to the consideration shown to us as women, by men. As a human being I couldn't stop thinking about X, couldn't stop myself from scanning the newspapers the next day, my mind in a whirl about what might happen to him, what could have happened to him, since the time we left Sopore. The often-voiced fears of the many mothers we'd met suddenly came alive for me. As a young man, he was the most hated, the most vulnerable; hot-headed, outspoken, a potential militant. For the next two days, every once in a while my thoughts would return to him; who would shield him from his fate, the way he had shielded us from ours? Who would pray for him?

Postscript

Today we went back to Sopore after three days to meet the family again. The FIR (First Information Report) had still not been lodged, even four days after the incident. When the parents had first gone to the police station, the gates were shut in their faces^a Then the earthquake came, like a godsend for the police, and the police station has stayed shut since, citing the excuse of personnel being deployed for relief work in Uri.

The second thing we learnt was that at the time of the funeral procession, the *fidayeen* attack (or encounter, whichever you prefer) was still in progress, so there WAS firing going on^a The man we'd evacuated to hospital had a really ghastly wound on his forehead, and his brain was visible through the back of his skull. I kept telling Hansa that it looked like a bullet wound. I might be wrong. The point is, the attack was still on when the tremors began; there was only a brief lull in the firing during the earthquake, after which it started again^a Probably that was what X meant by 'It's going to get worse'^{a,f}

I'm still wondering what will happen to him^a not what, really, but when^a



Troubleshooting

Technologies of Communication in Turbulent Times



A Candle in My Window

PETER GRIFFIN

On 26 December 2004, South-east Asia was hit by a double tragedy: a huge earthquake off the Indonesian coast, followed by a tsunami that wreaked havoc on the coastlines of countries around the Indian Ocean. The death and destruction that those waters brought defied description. The world was shocked. And then came the second wave: a huge outpouring of concern, sympathy, desire to help, and a need for information.

With a disparate bunch of people from all over the world, most of whom I never knew before that day, most of whom I will probably never meet but who I now count as friends, I was part of an online initiative that started out as TsunamiHelp, and became the South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami Blog, known also as the SEA-EAT blog.¹ It took up large chunks of my waking hours until the end of January, and in many ways, big and small, changed my life.

This isn't a definitive account. It's a very personal view; half a narration of the events as I remember them, half an attempt to understand it better myself.

I had been blogging since late 2003, and in mid 2004, I began to develop a fascination with collaborative blogs. Caferati, a collablog² I set up for an online writers' forum I co-moderate, had done reasonably well for itself. I was also one of Rohit Gupta's early invitees to the (now defunct) media watch blog, DesiMediaBitch (DMB). In mid-December, I had been helping Rohit and the other members invite guest bloggers from among India's neighbours to take part in this great idea that he came up with, to take DMB beyond the *desi* (local/indigenous): a week, starting 26 December, of exclusive bitching from across our

borders, after which our guest bloggers would become permanent members. DMB morphed into Dogs Without Borders, which became Chien(ne)s Sans Frontières or just CSF, a tongue-in-cheek homage to Médecins Sans Frontières.

And then the tsunami hit.

As the news began coming in, I shuttled between TV in the living room and the computer on my desk; the extent of the disaster started to dawn on me. Part of me desperately wanted to do something, anything, to help. I considered heading south, but for a variety of reasons, partly financial, but mostly selfish and personal, that wasn't an option. At some point I realised that vast quantities of help would be needed, and that there really wasn't anything like a single repository for aid information that I knew of. Perhaps the best thing I could do would be to collate that information, put it all together in one place. It didn't occur to me to try this on my own. I didn't have the kind of reach or readership to have any useful impact, for one. And it was just too big a task for one person, anyway.

First Steps

Rohit Gupta (who, by the way, I had not met in person at that time) and I exchanged a flurry of SMSes and phone calls. He promptly agreed to join in. I quickly set up a blog on blogger.com, a popular free web publishing service. I chose Blogger without really thinking about it too much. It was the only blog provider I knew of that permitted multiple contributors; and it was, thanks to Caferati and DMB, an interface I was comfortable with. Besides, it was pretty simple to use, and since it was popular, chances were that most of the people we contacted would know how to use it. I put up a placeholder post stating our broad intentions; later deleted; and we began hunting up information, while simultaneously carpet-bombing our address books to invite bloggers we knew to join in. Dina Mehta, an influential blogger (and another person I only knew online), was one of the first to jump into the effort.

Dina and Rohit both wrote for World Changing (WC),³ a highly-regarded group blog. They both wrote about TsunamiHelp, as we called it then, on WC. One of WC's leading members in turn tipped off Boing Boing,⁴ who linked to us. Around the same time, I had mailed Prem Panicker, Managing Editor at Rediff in the US (yet another online-only friend). Almost immediately, all Rediff's coverage⁵ began to feature a link to our blog. Out of habit, I had plugged a Sitemeter⁶ counter in to the blog. Suddenly, I noticed that the viewership had started multiplying: from the few hundred initial visitors that probably resulted from our mass mailings, to thousands every hour. Somewhere around then, we realised we were in the middle of something far bigger than we had imagined.

The next day, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* in the UK had written about us, and put our URL in their articles. Shortly after, the BBC linked to us as well, listing us as a reliable resource. These and many other news organisations across the world cited us as an authoritative source for information.⁷ The search giant Google put a tsunami aid link on their home page (unprecedented for them), and linked to us from their dedicated Tsunami page.⁸ Later, through the efforts of one of our members who had friends working in Google

(the owner of Blogger) we were guaranteed unlimited bandwidth, ensuring that the site wouldn't go down. And of course, bloggers and webmasters linked to us by the thousands too.

Traffic, as a result, was overwhelming: over a million visitors in the first eight days. Sitemeter, the provider of the free tracker I had installed, had to shut down our counter several times because the load was hampering their service to their paid clients. Our mailboxes were bombarded with offers to help; not just from people wanting to blog with us, but people asking how they could help directly.

There was much discussion in the group about what exactly we were trying to do, at times (as can happen even in the best-intentioned groups) at the cost of constructive action. To some of us it was clear that news organisations had the resources to provide much better hard news coverage than we could hope to. Wikinews, in its first real test as a news source, was doing a sterling job of newsgathering via collaboration⁹ too. What was missing was a single place to find information about the NGOs and aid organisations working on the ground. The press was already referring to us as the leading clearinghouse for information on the victims of the disaster.

All this helped us hastily, but formally, define our task: collate news and information about resources, aid, donations and volunteer efforts. We set some ground rules: no politics, no opinions, steer away from controversy, just find out about and link to aid efforts.

Around then, because some of us felt that Tsunami Help as a name didn't encompass the earthquake which was the cause of the tsunami, we also formally changed the name of the blog to the South-East Asia Earthquake and Tsunami blog.

Adapt, Improve, Innovate^a

The group self-organised very smoothly, with very little centralised control. Email addresses and phone numbers were exchanged via group mails and instant messengers. The Google Groups¹⁰ mailing list I had attempted to start as a coordination mechanism was in limbo; I had invited too many people in a short period, so it went into automatic review for spam. Someone else started a Yahoo!Groups list,¹¹ which became the main channel for communication.

Thanks to the furious pace at which this very enthusiastic group was working, the blog had already become huge. Searching within all those posts was tedious for us, its creators; it would be much more difficult for a first-time visitor anxiously looking for something specific. Part of this was due to the limitations of the template we were using. We realised that while Blogger made collaboration by multiple contributors easy, it had serious limitations as well: no native way to classify or tag individual posts till date; and, at that time, no comment moderation or ways to avoid comment spam.¹² We worked around this by splitting the blog into sub-blogs with different focus areas. Teams took charge of each one, and began copying content from the main blog into Tsunami Enquiries/Helplines/Emergency Services, Tsunami Missing Persons, Tsunami News Updates, Tsunami Help Needed and Tsunami Help Offered. Meanwhile, a design pro in the team took charge, corrected my initial ham-handed efforts to tweak the design, and created a template that wasn't just much easier on the eye, but also organised the information far more efficiently.¹³

Someone suggested that a wiki would be an even better idea, and perhaps what we should have done in the first place. But since so many organisations and individuals were already directing traffic to the blog URL, moving home would mean unnecessary extra clicks for visitors. Besides, not everyone in this blogger-heavy group was wiki-savvy. So, instead of replacing the blog with a wiki, we decided to make it a parallel effort. Initially, we created a wiki as part of Wikinews, but ran into disagreements with the administrators there.¹⁴ To cut out the squabbles, Dina paid to register a domain name, tsunamihelp.info, Rudi Cilibrasi donated server space, and a team of wiki-adepts began work, copying, categorising and pasting content from the blog. Another team worked on creating a database of volunteers and volunteer efforts, based on all the requests and offers of help, a project which evolved into AsiaQuake.

Rather than everyone trying to do everything at the same time, the teams evolved sets of duties. Janitors checked posts and cleaned up typos, made sure links worked, that the correct info was going into the correct places, that unvetted or controversial things weren't going online. Monitors checked the various dedicated e-mail addresses we had set up and information that readers were leaving in the comments to our posts. Linkers made sure the data in the sidebar stayed current, after some erroneous and outdated coverage was discovered. Aside from e-mail, we also used Yahoo! Messenger for instant communication, both one-on-one and using its conference facility¹⁵ to hold meetings. When inaccurate information about the effort began appearing in the media, a few of us who had experience in the field worked out a system for answering questions from the press. Those of us with the necessary contacts networked with NGOs to get information from the ground. Blogger's native search wasn't delivering well enough, so Pim Techamuanwitt paid for a professional search tool that we plugged in. Someone came up with the idea of using Flickr¹⁶ and its tags to help the Missing Persons effort, and quickly set up a Flickr pool. A working-group page with presence indicators that keep track of things like who was doing what, and what needed to be done, was set up on space given to us by SocialText.¹⁷ A translations group took charge of creating versions in other languages. Work on a database began alongside.

Pulling Together (and, Sometimes, Apart)

To this day, I haven't been able to figure out precisely how many people chipped in to help. Sure, you could tot up the numbers: the contributors listed on the blog's side panel; the IDs and IP numbers on the wiki; the subscribers to the newsgroup. You'd wind up with a number over 200... but that's just part of the story. They came from everywhere, Asia, Europe, North America, South America, Australia (I don't recall too much African traffic, strangely enough) connected only by the web. They included veteran bloggers, geeks, poets, lawyers, executives, academics, teenage students, foodies, lit-lovers, database wonks, wiki fans, cooks, stay-at-home moms, designers, artists. They mailed in information, they blogged, they linked, they commented, they wikied, they copied, pasted and sorted data, they put their lives on hold and put out their hands to do what they could. Miraculously, each time we needed something done, someone stepped up with the knowledge and expertise, and just did it. Solutions were improvised; like the sub-blogs and the Flickr page; and somehow, it all worked.

Over multiple chat windows we kept each other motivated, encouraging ; nay, *ordering* ; one another to get some sleep, some food, some relaxation, while ignoring similar exhortations directed at ourselves.

But it wasn't all good vibrations. With the frenetic levels of activity and stress, there was bound to be some friction.

There were frayed tempers, misunderstandings, and a couple of blow-ups. A potentially interesting offshoot, ARC (Alert Retrieval Cache),¹⁸ which posted SMS text messages to a web page, unfortunately sustained collateral damage in one of the two major interpersonal conflagrations that hit the group. The other flare-up happened because the group was being harried by one person's needless barrage of e-mail. Instant decisions had to be taken, and were, with some unpleasantness that still hasn't quite gone away. In a more amicable parting of ways, a few bloggers separated to run a blog that followed the same model but also included political comment and opinion.¹⁹ Overall, it was difficult to know where to draw the line between gently reining in over-enthusiasm and curbing efforts by some members to promote their own agendas. I'll wager we erred on the wrong side of that line as often as not.

And resentments, yes. In the midst of a related initiative, long after January, Dina and I discovered that some people thought we were hogging media attention to further our own consultancies. For the record, Dina is a researcher and ethnographer, I'm essentially a writer for hire. Neither of us consult on blogs, and most of the people we consult for still haven't a clue what a blog is. What's important, however, is that these resentments didn't surface at that point. Work continued uninterrupted, quality kept getting better. What kept us going was the knowledge that in some small way, we were helping. Many of us were spending all our waking hours online, and getting very little sleep when we did take a break. The baton was passed from hand to hand across countries, continents and time zones.

No single person was indispensable ; willing hands took up the slack whenever someone had to leave. I remember blogging until my taxi arrived at the door, packing my laptop, bandaging a bleeding thumb en route (I had sliced it on a razor while I was cramming things into a haversack) and getting to my Delhi train just in time. By the time I next logged on 18 hours later, in the home of my friends Devangshu and Nilanjana, so many developments had taken place that I never really caught up or caught on. One just assumed that things had been taken care of. In the inbox of the e-mail address I used for the group, some 300 unread messages from the mailing list still stare accusingly at me. And that's after clearing out roughly 400 in several instalments.

Food? Ignored. Sleep was a dispensable luxury. People turned party invitations down without a qualm (it didn't seem right for me, I know, to celebrate the New Year; I'm sure others felt the same). People apologised profusely for the time to took to move from a work PC to a home PC. Work itself was neglected: for those of us who worked on our own, as freelancers and entrepreneurs, it meant non-working (i.e., unpaid) time. For the ones holding down jobs, it meant juggling everyday tasks with the SEA-EAT effort. I remember InstantMessaging our designer about the blog not showing up properly on one browser. Give me a minute, she said, I just have to tell someone to go away. An hour of painstaking

tweaking (on her part) and wailing (on mine) later, we had sorted it out. Who was that you shooed away?^f I asked her. My boss^f, she typed back, adding a smiley. Another member excused himself briefly as midnight came around on 31 December. He was back in a very short while. He d just popped up to raise a toast to the New Year with the folks in his apartment, and was back at his computer in minutes. One member quietly and calmly took over the tech coordination when others burned out. Another spent huge amounts of time online though she had to make crucial preparations for on upcoming wedding ; her own! Another didn t sleep for several days, fuelled only by rice, coffee and adrenaline.

I can t speak for the offline support other people got. I know I got plenty. DD and Nilanjana kept thrusting plates of food and mugs of coffee into my hand, letting me hog their broadband connection while they shared the other PC and the dial-up. Quiet calming encouragement from them and from Annie. Their toleration of my whining and angst when things were getting tense. Nilanjana telling me about explaining the blog to her grandmother in Calcutta: the lady looked at the screen in silence for a few minutes, then got on the phone to all her friends, telling them, We can t let these youngsters do everything!^f Those elderly ladies then organised collection drives, doing the *grande dame* thing with hapless club managers and the like to get donations. Nilanjana and DD again, calling up their friends in the Indian media ; with a few honourable exceptions, most had no clue that this thing was going on in their backyard, so to speak ; to clue them in, then helping me condense this new, rather exotic concept into media-friendly morsels. Friends sent supportive SMSes, mailed in links. These things stayed with me.

The Chien(ne)s Sans Frontières Effort

Side by side, another enormous effort was taking place. Some of the bloggers of CSF, the blogs-across-borders week forgotten, were blogging, mailing and SMSing from the frontline. Dilip D Souza was mailing in practical advice from Tamil Nadu: *don t send clothes, they re lying in piles on the roadsides*. Four young men in Sri Lanka, three in their teens, one barely out of them, were witnessing what no human being should have to ; devastation, morgues, identifying corpses, burials in graves they helped dig^a They spoke passionately of aid not getting to where it was needed, of corruption and inefficiency. One of them, Morquendi (an online handle, since I haven t been able to get his permission to use his real name) and I chatted online for hours one night, the matter-of-fact text of his IMs detailing the political games that were being played, the risks he and his young friends were taking, the things they were seeing. He was worried about them. They re so young, he said. *How old are you, Morq*, I typed. 23, he wrote back. I brushed away tears several times that night, not for the first time in those weeks.

Hindsight

Did we do any good? Did we meet our own expectations?

Frankly, we didn t have a formal agenda when we started. We just did the best we could, as we saw it then. Some people donate money. Others send clothing, food, medicines.

Some go to the affected areas and volunteer. We had web expertise, we knew how to look for information, how to make it user-friendly, we had networks. That's what we could give, and we did. My friend Nilanjana Roy put it into words for me. She said 'It was your way of putting a candle in your window to show that you cared'.

Did we change the world? Did we make a significant difference? In small ways, I do believe we did. Looking back, we know we were able to help. From the emails, the traffic counter, from the links to us from global news organisations and blogs, we infer that we were able to provide valuable information at a time when it counted. Together, we created a little bit of Net history, created a model for online collaboration that did the job. A model that we, or others, can refine (and have done so) and make more effective.

Going On from There^a

Some of the TsunamiHelp team continued to stay in touch, to build friendships on the strength of that month of working together. We debated the creation of a formal organisation, of documenting processes, but for most of us, we'd neglected the rest of our lives for too long, and the process of catching up meant that these thoughts fizzled out.

I had begun to think that SEA-EAT was a one-off, but I was relieved to see that when there were a couple of subsequent earthquake scares in the region, many of the team, alerted by the newsgroup, immediately got back in touch and began updating the blog and wiki.

Then, on 26 July 2005, north Bombay was hit by 944 mm of rain in one day; what the weather people called a cloudburst. Much of the suburbs stayed flooded for days. People were stranded in offices or on the roads. Residents of ground-floor flats found themselves with almost all their possessions unsalvageable. Many lived through days of waterlogging, no electricity, no phones, but plenty of anxiety. In the aftermath, a group of city bloggers, with a bunch of friends from other parts of the world, began to put together two blogs. Mumbai Help focused on creating a resource that would be useful not just in the immediate situation but for future reference as well. Cloudburst Mumbai was more specific, concentrating on information about the flooding, news reports, aid efforts and the like. Both blogs got respectable readership, though nothing close to the SEA-EAT figures. Out of these efforts, some of us, plus a few other like-minded folk, started up an initiative called ThinkMumbai, to look at some of the city's deep-rooted problems, and to provide some aids for future difficult times. That effort went into a long hiatus, but a few of us are in the process of reviving it this year.

In late August, Hurricane Katrina smashed its way through New Orleans. Several days before that, as it became clear that Katrina was very likely to hit the coast, some members of the SEA-EAT team had swung into action. There was a blog, but it was incidental. Based on the SEA-EAT experience, the team made the wiki the focus of their efforts. And that wiki logged a million visitors in two days. Of course that's largely due to the fact that internet penetration in the US is of a completely different order of magnitude, and this disaster was happening in their own backyard. The team used the database methods earlier put to use to match volunteers and NGOs to assist in projects, such as a People Finder and a Shelter

Finder. They also came up with fresh ideas, such as creating and using a local Skype²⁰ number as a call centre, manned by shifts of volunteers in three continents.

In October, an earthquake near the India-Pakistan border in Kashmir resulted in major losses of life and property. Again, many members of the SEA-EAT and CSF teams, plus others from the MumbaiHelp effort, got together to try and help out. With the remoteness of the area, and the consequent paucity of information, the team went back to a blog as the centre of the effort. An attempt to create a system where SMSes could be sent direct to a blog didn't work out.

In December 2005, Bala Pitchandi and Angelo Embuldeniya came up with the idea of a memorial week that would try and bring the world's attention back to the victims and survivors of the year's disasters, a campaign that got a lot of support across the web. Around the same time, the group decided that starting a new blog or wiki each time something bad wasn't the best way to approach this. That meant establishing credibility and search engine rankings each time. We decided to bring it all under one umbrella, and we now call ourselves the World Wide Help (WWH) group. The methods we follow are to post alerts and warnings to the WWH blog (and by now, with our links to NGOs, world bodies and relief agencies, we're able to keep tabs on potential crises pretty efficiently); and if a situation looks like becoming a major disaster, we then look at creating a focused resource.

We used the WWH blog during the floods in Suriname in May 2006, with a combination of news reports, translation efforts, on-the-ground reporting, and information from relief organisations.

This July, around the time I was revising my draft of this essay, seven bombs planted by terrorists went off in Mumbai local trains during the evening rush hour, killing 181 commuters and injuring another 890. The city was in chaos; suburban trains on the Western Railway line were obviously not running. But road traffic was jammed too, at a standstill. Phone lines were jammed; as rumours and panic spread, everybody seemed to be trying to call everyone else at the same time. Networks couldn't take that load, naturally, so huge numbers of people got no information whatsoever, which only fuelled the confusion. Family and friends in other parts of the world frantically trying to make sure their loved ones were safe only added to it. Some of us turned to the web for answers, and MumbaiHelp came back to life, with a flurry of e-mails, first-person reports on road conditions, hospital numbers, and more.

And, just in case I had begun to think I was becoming a bit of a guru on this online relief thing, my collaborators taught me something new. One post, titled 'How can we help you?' got a few hundred comments that night. It became a *de facto* forum, with people leaving names and phone numbers of their relatives, and others popping up to make calls, send SMSes and confirm that yes, your brother, your friend, your aunt, was indeed safe.

And So We're the Best Thing That Happened to the Web, Right?

I've heard talk about how SEA-EAT and subsequent efforts have outdone big media. I don't believe a word of that. It is a fact that we did get a lot of attention, and that, ironically, was

thanks to media coverage of some of the things we did. Did we supplant big media, do their jobs? Heavens, no. Our biggest successes in terms of traffic were SEA-EAT, which got a million viewers in about eight days, and the Katrina wiki, which got that much in a day. For the big media sites, those figures are peanuts. None of them is trembling in fear of bloggers yet, I'll wager. Citizen journalism, even the segment that WWH specialises in, online relief aid, only supplements the efforts of the media, of formal relief agencies, of government bodies.

But here's the thing. There was a week on the cusp of 2004-2005 when 1 million people didn't find what they wanted anywhere else. When Katrina hit, a million others couldn't find the information they needed elsewhere that day. When the bombs went off in the Mumbai local trains, 40-50,000 people didn't find what they were looking for in the media. We were able to reach out a hand to them, in our small way. We lit our candle, and showed we cared.

Author's Note

I earn my living as a writer and communicator, and I can get pretty evangelistic about blogs, but for the longest time, I was unable to write about SEA-EAT. I talked about it a lot to friends, answered e-mails from researchers and students, was even interviewed about it several times. But I was never able to write about it. I really don't know why. Until a friend/fellow blogger and journalist/contributor to SEA-EAT, Jai Arjun Singh, who was writing an article for a national newsmagazine, mailed me a few queries as part of his research. As I sat down to reply to him, suddenly the words broke free. I spent the next few hours hammering away at the keyboard, referring back frequently to archived e-mails I had written to journalists who'd asked questions.

Acknowledgement

Nilanjana S. Roy kept pushing me to write this text, despite my natural laziness. Jai Arjun Singh provided the trigger I needed, with his incisive questions. I referred to posts by Dina Mehta and Bala Pitchandi to check on my recollection of the sequence of events. Dina and Bala, Megha Murthy, Neha Vishwanathan, Nilanjana S. Roy and Devangshu Datta critiqued this account for me at various times and gave me their opinions, invaluable in fine-tuning it from the first disjointed scribbles. Shuddhabrata Sengupta gave me the extra impetus to actually complete this by giving me the opportunity to write for this year's *Sarai Reader*. And every member of all the collaborations I've been part of helped me understand the process a little better, while we helped each other refine, modify and make more useful, often on the fly, a very raw, untried concept.

NOTES

1. SEA-EAT: <http://tsunamihelp.blogspot.com> (blog) and <http://www.tsunamihelp.info> (wiki).
2. A portmanteau neologism I coined for collaborative weblog.
3. See <http://www.worldchanging.com/>
4. See <http://www.boingboing.net/>. Started in 1988 as the world's greatest neurozine and focused on cyberpunk subculture, developed into a website in 1995, then to an award-winning weblog in 2000.
5. For Rediff's dedicated tsunami section, see <http://www.rediff.com/news/tsunami.htm>
6. See <http://www.sitemeter.com>. Sitemeter is a counter that many bloggers and webmasters use to track traffic.
7. For press descriptions of the TsunamiHelp effort, see

- http://www.tsunamihelp.info/wiki/index.php/In_the_media
8. Google's Tsunami relief page: http://www.google.com/tsunami_relief.html
 9. Wikinews page on the earthquake and tsunami:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Indian_Ocean_earthquake
 10. <http://groups.google.com/group/TsunamiHelp>
 11. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/seaeatvolunteers/>
 12. Comment spam includes machine-generated spam crammed with links to commercial sites. Many popular blogs are plagued by this.
 13. For the depth and detail of just one aspect of Megha Murthy's redesign of SEA-EAT, see <http://www.meghalomania.com/expand-collapse-script-for-blogger-blogs/>
 14. For details, see <http://balaspot.blogspot.com/2005/12/how-my-life-changed.html>
 15. Yahoo!Messenger lets multiple users text-chat simultaneously. We used this like a conference room, staying logged in, but also chatting one-on-one in private windows. <http://messenger.yahoo.com/>
 16. Flickr is a photo-hosting site (then comparatively new) that permitted tagging of pictures, group pools and a degree of social networking. <http://www.flickr.com/>
 17. For the workgroup page, see http://www.socialtext.net/tsunamihelp/index.cgi?who_s_doing_what
 18. ARC's current status can be checked at <http://www.socialtext.net/tsunamihelp/index.cgi?arc>
 19. Progressive Tsunami Help: <http://progressivetsunamihelp.blogspot.com/>
 20. Skype is a Voice Over Internet Protocol provider. The service lets you make calls not just from Skype user to Skype user, but also to and from landlines. <http://www.skype.com>

WorldWideHelp Group Links:

SEA-EAT / TsunamiHelp main blog: <http://tsunamihelp.blogspot.com>

Sub-blogs:

<http://tsunamienquiry.blogspot.com/>

<http://tsunamimissing.blogspot.com/>

<http://tsunamiupdates.blogspot.com/>

<http://tsunamihelpwanted.blogspot.com/>

<http://tsunamihelpoffered.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.tsunamihelp.info> (wiki)

Cloudburst Mumbai: <http://cloudburstmumbai.blogspot.com>

Mumbai Help: <http://mumbaihelp.blogspot.com> (blog); <http://mumbaihelp.jot.com> (wiki)

Katrina Help: <http://katrinahelp.blogspot.com>; <http://katrinahelp.info>

Rita Help: <http://ritahelp.blogspot.com>; <http://ritahelp.info>

Quake Help: <http://quakehelp.blogspot.com> (blog); <http://smsquake.blogspot.com/> (SMS-to-blog failed experiment); <http://quakehelp.asiaquake.org/> (wiki)

Avian Flu Help (H5N1): <http://avianfluhelp.blogspot.com/>

WorldWideHelp: <http://worldwidehelp.blogspot.com>; <http://www.worldwidehelp.info/>

Further Reading

Tsunami Crisis: An Analytical World View*f*. See Intelliseek's *Blogpulse*: <http://tsunami.blogpulse.com/>

Open Source Disaster Recovery: Case Studies of Networked Collaboration*f*. Study by Calvert Jones and Sarai

Mitnick of the School of Information, University of California, Berkeley. In *First Monday*,

http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_5/jones/index.html

Tsunami Blog among 10 Most Popular Humanitarian Sites^f. See *Hitwise*,

http://www.hitwise.com/press-center/hitwiseHS2004/tsunami_010105.html

Social Tools: Ripples to Waves of the Future^f. See Dina Mehta's blog, *Conversations with Dina*,

<http://radio.weblogs.com/0121664/2005/05/29.html#a630>

How My Life Changed^f. See Bala Pitchandi's blog, *Bala's Ramblings 2.1*:

<http://balaspot.blogspot.com/2005/12/how-my-life-changed.html>

For commentary on blogs and the media, see *We, the Media*^f, script of a speech by Ashok Malik at the Asian School of Journalism, Chennai. <http://wethemedia.blogspot.com/2005/11/ashok-malik-on-blogs-and-media.html>

History of Blogic. Articles by Jai Arjun Singh, Amit Varma and T. R. Vivek in *Outlook*, Volume XLVI, Issue 1, 9 January 2006, p 60. For online text (subscription required), see

<http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20060109&fname=H4Bloggers+%28F%29&sid=1>

The Coming of Age of Citizen Media^f. See Jane Perrone, in the *Guardian* news blog.

See http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/news/archives/2005/12/26/the_coming_of_age_of_citizen_media.html

Support Iraqi Bloggers

Interview with Cecile Landman

GEERT LOVINK

Cecile Landman is a Dutch freelance investigative journalist, specialising in the facts behind the news. One of the areas she works in is Italy, a country she is passionate about. Cecile has often said to me that she was born in the wrong part of Europe, as her energetic character does not resonate well with the cold, Calvinist Dutch, and their similar meteorological condition. Yet, the language and lifestyle of another country can also be a culture that one inhabits and carries around, no matter where one is. And that's what Cecile does, when she logs onto the internet. Since mid-2004, Cecile has been in daily contact with Iraqi bloggers. Together with founder Jo van der Spek, Cecile initiated Streamtime, an international support campaign for new media initiatives in Iraq. The work of Streamtime goes back to 1990s' 'tactical media' initiatives, in particular Press Now, an Amsterdam-based campaign founded in 1993 for the support of independent media in the former Yugoslavia. The scene around Press Now, closely connected to the internet provider xs4all and the cultural centre De Balie, is also known for its efforts to keep the Belgrade radio station/internet initiative and cultural hotspot B92 on air and online, in particular during the war in Kosovo and the NATO bombings of Serbia in 1999.

Fast-forward four, five years, and the situation looks very different. Efforts to support independent media and internet initiatives in Iraq after the US-led invasion of 2003 have been aborted quickly because of hostage taking, killings and car bombs. One year after their arrival, NGOs and aid agencies had to pull out of Iraq. Government agencies and autonomous foundations refused to allocate financial means for aid work or media initiatives because they judged the situation too risky. By late 2004, hardly any media support work

was possible within Iraq, one cynical explanation being that travel insurance had become insanely expensive. Workshops such as the ones conducted by the Berlin-based group Streamminister have since been held in Amman, Jordan.

After initial funding provided by HIVOS, amongst others, Streamtime no longer has any funding. In response to the deteriorating security situation, Streamtime gradually started to focus on the online support of Iraqi bloggers, inside or outside the country. What Cecile shares with many of her Italian friends and colleagues is a deep interest in the power structures behind the media spectacle. In the case of Italy, we only need to mention the mafia, banks, the army, the Vatican and the P2 Loge, not to forget fascist leagues. Enough to investigate ; and a good school for spin watchers.

Geert Lovink: Could you describe to us what an average blogging day of yours is like? Do you visit sites and follow links? How do you track, store and process all the information you find?

Cecile Landman: When I get up, I start the computer and the coffee machine simultaneously. First, I check some sites of the bloggers that I am most curious about. I am interested in their personal lives, but also how they write, how they play with different writing styles, and their concepts of what constitutes 'information'. I am looking for amazing stories and styles, not in the first place the stories that reach mainstream media, but stories that can give insight as to how 'the Iraqi soul' is developing through all they're being confronted with, that immense and immensely destructive daily economic, political and military violence. On a daily basis I visit at least a dozen Iraqi blogs. Besides, I check some specific Italian media and international newspapers, or specific news sites, varying from the big press-agencies to GNN to some more personally preferred ones, just for fun. I occasionally visit a Dutch site. There are also days that I visit no more than ten sites, and that's it.

Visiting Iraqi blogs has become an evolving ritual, together but not necessarily parallel, with the developments in the broader Iraqi blogosphere. I know quite a few inside stories from the Iraqi blogosphere, and not all of them can be shared. Secrecy is absolutely inevitable. Through chats or bloggers I met personally, my insights also change; and as a consequence, some bloggers in my eyes have become 'mainstream' bloggers who I rarely visit anymore. Some others are starting to provoke, or in 'the beginning' had a serious blog, and have now started other blogs where they write more provocatively. Through different ways of writing they're experimenting, and checking what responses they get to their posts. Seeing the history of Iraq, this is already incredibly surprising, amazing. Like someone who was not allowed to talk, or use his voice, for long, long years. Now they have started talking with the outside.

When I first joined Streamtime in June 2004, I followed a lot of Iraqi blogs and, more significantly, their comment sections. That seemed the place where it all happened back then. Comments on one posting could run into the hundreds. Daily. Or to be more precise: nightly. What was most striking were the violent tones and attitudes in those debates. I was flabbergasted, and at the same time most fascinated. Also horrified. I started to mingle and

join these discussions, with the aim to promote Streamtime, get involved and make some waves. I stopped doing that, because most of the time this mode of interaction gave the feeling of being smashed on the head with a baseball bat.

"Masochism", Iraqi Raed Jarrar and his Iranian girlfriend Niki, both bloggers, said to me when they visited Amsterdam in November 2004. However, I learned a lot from the comment sections of the blogs; and from there I followed a lot of links, of which 75% were crap, but the rest turned out to be useful. I store most of what I find and shouldn't forget on the Streamtime site itself, although Streamtime doesn't have a search option. Other stuff goes to the Xer-files, mailboxes and a 'good' folder. The rest is stored and processed in my mind, and comes back in chats with I-bloggers.

GL: How do blogging and investigative journalism relate? At first glance, they seem either oppositional or potentially supplementary practices. Whereas the investigative journalist works months, if not years, to uncover a story, bloggers appear to be more like an army of ants that contribute to the great hill called 'public opinion'. Bloggers prefer to post comments, and rarely add new facts to a story. How do you look at this relation from the perspective of the investigative journalist? You are one of few that combine the two activities. Is blogging a secondary activity? Is it at all useful to create such hierarchies?

CL: Journalists, and certainly the investigative types, need to make a living. They can't put just anything online. Bloggers don't seem to bother too much about this, and that does create a conflict. Indeed, I work in both worlds. On my Xer-files blog I link to jokes and side-information that I can't post on the Streamtime site. Rarely do I write an entry on it. I use my personal blog as a 'megaphone' for issues that I find interesting, more like a public library...

I started my blog by coincidence. I wanted to leave a comment on an Iraqi blog, but for that I had to identify myself as a blogger. Then I created a blog of my own, which is mainly linked to and read by Iraqis. At first I tried to use it to link information from the former Yugoslavia, about cartoonists and humour from Belgrade, stories about first web-experiences and information exchange in the former Yugoslavia during the '90s war. I wanted to make these materials available for Iraqi readers. The blog was also used as a back-up for Streamtime when this site was cracked.

Interestingly enough, blogging is changing existing formats of information. As we can see over a broader spectrum of conventional journalism, people are getting bored with the given formats; they don't catch up with the news anymore, they acknowledge its presence but no longer pay it any real attention. It is like a song that you have heard too often, or a commercial advertisement: you hear it, you can even sing the words, but they are without meaning. Mainstream media has started to grasp this. They have no choice now but to search for new formats in order to attract readers (read: advertisers).

This is especially visible in the trend towards 'infotainment'. The impact of the advertising industry on information is heavy, and seen from the Italian media/political perspective, for example, this recipe doesn't make people more clever or intelligent. In fact,

I heard (but didn't check, so I didn't post about it) that about 69% of the Italian populace has become 're-analphabetised' because they don't read anymore and only watch TV. Link this factoid with the fact that Italian TV is politically abused by Premier Berlusconi and his mates, and you get a strange picture.

Blog reading and writing has become popular because these are personal forms. I would say it is a positive development that people read each other's commentaries on the news or on local developments. Because of the personal factor in blogging, you don't have to bother about objectivity. A blog is subjective by its very nature. Comments can be left on blogs, and through this, the traditional media concept of one-way communication becomes a tool for multilateral communication, discussions, quarrels, a lot of nonsense, and more.

We have to distinguish between various 'blogospheres'. If you take a look at the meta-blog Global Voices Online, the differences are obvious. This is a non-profit global citizens media project, sponsored and launched from Harvard Law School. It uses all kinds of technologies – blogs, wikis, podcasts, tags, aggregators, online chats, audio/video, to link conversations and views from all over the world. Then you also have, for instance, the community of so-called 'pajama bloggers' in the US, who put out personal critiques and counter-perspectives to the information put out by the mainstream media. Whereas journalists are a kind of 'army' that should control the powers-that-be, bloggers have started to 'control' conventional journalism through their commentary on the news and on the manner of reportage. Given the conditions under which mainstream media operates, this can, potentially, only be a good development.

Who controls the quality of the blog posts? Where does the journalist walk out and the blogger slide in? I'd say, this is done through accessing available sources. Bloggers I post about on Streamtime are nearly all people I chat and mail with regularly. I 'know' them. So I know their information can be trusted. I use my blog and the Streamtime site in every possible way to get information out that otherwise probably won't be 'out' there. I don't bother too much about copyright. That's a luxury Iraqi journalists can't afford. But I do my journalistic research over the sources and the information, and I mix bloggers' information with information from articles that I consider valuable, written by heavyweight journalists working in the Iraqi region. So it is a two-way situation; the Streamtime blog is as much about making local information available to 'the West' as it is about giving various kinds of information to Iraqi bloggers.

I had one good experience in which journalism (good journalism is always investigative) and blogging came together. It was research on the nowthatsfuckedup.com site. On this site, porn pictures were put together with war images from Afghanistan and Iraq. One title for one of the war pictures was "Cooked Iraqi"; and indeed, it showed a black, burned body, and grinning US soldiers around it, holding their thumbs up. With Haitham Sabbah, a blogger on JordanPlanet, we sort of individually and together shared our research and information. It was picked up not long after, by mainstream newspapers in the US that, by the way, did not refer to us as bloggers because otherwise they would find themselves in trouble regarding copyright.

I am crisscrossing, trying to connect complex worlds. I give feedback to the postings of Iraqi bloggers, and provide them with journalistic advice, e.g., on their writing style, and suggest subjects they could take up. I want the Iraqi bloggers to be as good as good journalists can be, while at the same time I don't want them to lose the personal factor in their writings. I am not getting paid for this work; I simply find it too important. So indeed, money is not an item for the blogger I've become^a but the journalist in me is hungry! And a hungry journalist is an angry journalist...

GL: The world of Iraqi blogging must be intense, tragic, encouraging, and very powerful at the same time. How do you and others deal with all the emotions online?

CL: Through a great sense of humour. One blogger, The Confused Kid, described it yesterday like this: "sweet black humour, last defence". Without black humour I don't know if I would have been able to continue with Streamtime. It is essential. I make fun with Iraqi bloggers, and I love their sharp observations, their wide-open minds. This happens as well with the Iraqis that I get to know in the Netherlands. They are poets, writers, painters, actors. Iraqis remind me of people from Naples who are theatrical, loud, rumour-makers. They gesture a lot, discuss and dance. Warm people. All have been harmed, scarred, violated. It is difficult. Sometimes I feel exhausted, processing war information from this position for the last one-and-a-half years. On the other hand, I find this important not only for the Iraqi people I am doing this with. When I observe developments in the Netherlands and in Europe, the case of Iraq becomes important for a number of reasons. I consider the communication between people in Iraq and people in 'our' worlds to be of extreme importance.

I don't know how to deal with the emotions. I sometimes cry, or scream, at other times laugh about it all. But when I notice that people on the other side of the line are sinking into despair, I try to cheer them up. What is difficult is when I realise they are telling me in not so many words that they don't talk about very rotten war events any more, the chains of kidnappings, the lack of electricity, and so forth. In some way, maybe we are all afraid that it is all just the same story as yesterday and the days and weeks, months, even years, before. Who wouldn't get bored with that? Same number or more dead in one day, does it matter? Numbers are still not being counted. "Who cares?!"

The thought that the Iraqis would become isolated once again is utterly unbearable. Sometimes, when someone in Iraq has a burnout, quits blogging and stops telling stories, I try to call them back, phone, mail, try to call in chat. And in the meantime I search for other stories on the web, in an attempt to find other input, maybe just a cartoon I can put online. Some people come back to blogging, others don't, or irregularly, but they do knock on my chat-door.

GL: Is there a way to keep cool under the stress of so much conspiracy, secret service activity and media involvement?

CL: No, but I try to manage, although it can get on my nerves. Like today. I just read a posting from Emigre. She started the Iraq Blog Count from Australia. Like me, she is not Iraqi. So I do see some similarities with my situation. She wrote that she found a transmitting device in her home, that wasn't hers. If it is what she thinks it is, then I wouldn't be surprised, but the paranoid factor definitely gets a renewed push upwards. I can imagine what it must feel like, to think that one is being followed by someone, some presence that is not known, that cannot be identified, but that can be clearly sensed. On the other hand, not speaking up, not to continue doing this, would be a worse option. I can see mainstream media, in particular US- and UK-based newspapers and agencies, changing their attitude towards bloggers. In the Netherlands, however, Streamtime and its contacts in Iraq continue to be neglected, even though Dutch media complain that they don't have reporters on the ground. I hear from people in Iraq that they have been asked to write for US newspapers, which some of them like to do, but they are scared that this would become known in Iraq, which could mean their death.

GL: In late 2004, Streamtime gave up working in Iraq itself. It became too dangerous. What does that mean for you? Do you look at blogging as a last resort?

CL: Yes and no. Switching from web radio workshops inside Iraq to blogging 'with Iraq' has shown itself to be a new starting point with unpredictable outcomes. The network of Iraqi bloggers is fragile, but it has consolidated by now. Emigre's work on Iraq Blog Count proved to be essential. Streamtime had a role in bringing some people together in and outside Iraq, namely supporting ideas of independent media inside Iraq, the forming of independent opinion, opening access points towards experiences in 'the West' with independent media, especially on the web, which seems essential to me.

GL: What is being discussed in the Iraqi blogosphere, apart from responses to suicide bombs, military attacks by occupied forces and political events?

CL: Sex, love and rock 'n roll. Ways to get out of the country, to build up another life. Ways of contacting each other. Styles of writing. Electricity and connectivity failures. The fact of just having escaped from an explosion or fire-fights on the street. Fast changes within Iraqi society. Iraqi politicians, clerics and Americans. University practices. Random chats with taxi-drivers: the most important tension is not to make yourself known, or give a clear opinion, but occasionally a real discussion in a taxi does take place. Changing conditions for women. Religion. Fears and angers. Some young kids post pictures of cats. The behaviour of children, or how parents can (not) protect their children. Tribal communities trying to organise on local levels. Media. The sandstorms. Or about humour. One of the bloggers recently told me, "We are becoming more serious. Getting more gloomy and moody because of the unknown future. We joke, but it's not as sincere as before. Jokes come out everyday. You should read Shalash al-Iraqi – this is the pen name of a courageous Iraqi writer who uses the

patois of the man in the street and the dialect of the most simple people in Iraq. "Between two rivers of blood, two rivers of tears, there is a country called Iraq", he writes on his blog, identifying himself as "a dedicated enemy of all who fantasise about the 7th century". You'll never find such black humour anywhere in the world, though I doubt if you can understand it, even though it is translated. It contains heavy Iraqi slang.

GL: How do you look at the fact that more and more Iraqis are blogging from outside of the country? So many Iraqis live in exile, and have been for so long. Blogger and diaspora communities seem to be almost one and the same...

CL: More and more Iraqis are trying to leave, or have already left the country; the post-invasion enthusiasm has faded away. Those in exile went back to Iraq, to visit family and friends, to be involved in poetry festivals, or to create theatre festivals for and with children in Iraq. But a lot of them are returning less and less to their former home country. It is very dangerous, and there's not much reason for optimism. The country could be closing again, but now because of war, religion, and sectarianism. "We don't want a racist government!" I just heard this in a chat, while right now in Baghdad big demonstrations are going on by (secular) Sunni and Shia together, for anger over the elections, and fears for a new isolated and repressed society.

Sometimes I get the idea, lately, that the Iraqi diaspora is becoming silent. Now, this is an observation from Amsterdam. Maybe there are places where diasporic Iraqis manage to stay involved with developments in Iraq. But the machineries of war are now so big that even people outside are becoming more pessimistic. Bloggers outside Iraq are still active, like Raed Jarrar who now lives in the US, or his mother from Amman. Even taking the diaspora into account, comparing Iraqi to other Arab blogospheres like the Jordanian, or Lebanese, there are big differences. What is also an eye-catcher is that other Arabic blogospheres sort of 'stay out' of the Iraqi one. From what I see, these spheres don't really mix, or connect very well.

GL: You do not read or speak Arabic. How do you, and others, deal with that?

CL: You cross-check by reading many sources and by asking different Iraqis their opinions and explanations about what is being written in the Iraqi/Arabic media. I use all my possible sources, and all the possible means I am aware of: Iraqis in and outside Iraq are close around me, here in the Netherlands. I ask them, until they get bored, to explain to me what I don't understand. I rarely shut up. I get stuff translated, in chats, when I ask for it. Iraqi slang used in black humour stories is difficult to translate, but it is the best back entrance if you want to get an insight into a culture.

GL: Do you encounter Islamic fundamentalists or traditional religious groups online? How do you deal with them?

CL: In the Iraqi blogosphere I haven't encountered any fundamentalist approaches. On the contrary; perhaps with the exception of hidden comments in a few blog comment sections, where sometimes you can find remarks that are about a metre in length with texts from the Quran. But most of the time these are ignored. Most of the bloggers are secular or gently religious, mainly Islam-oriented, but there are also Assyrian Christians. The closer you look, the more you can see the smaller divisions inside Islam. The tribal structures become more significant. Sometimes I do get mixed up in discussions (during chat sessions) about religion, even though I promised myself not to do so. They end up in declarations about what specific prophets said and what they meant.

I am not religious, and never have been. I grumble about old dusty ideas of existentialism, and 'do-it-yourself' practices. I say that religion, like politics, is all about 'power systems', with men on top, in most cases. To me, as a woman, seeing the results, religion doesn't make sense. During such dialogue I take the freedom to discuss in the manner that I am 'normally' accustomed to. But in order to be 'equal', it is necessary to be aware of the different histories, actualities, and cultural diversities; the world certainly is not that flat. It is complex and bumpy. I consider myself quite ignorant regarding 'religion' and Arab cultures. Because of this, I consider it very important to listen very carefully to what is really said, and try to ask the right questions. Religion is some sort of magic, so my 'rationality' probably isn't suitable to provide a better interpretation. Another aspect is that there are more Sunnis blogging than Shia. Together with some Iraqi bloggers I'm trying to find out why, because we are searching for more Shia people that are blogging, or want to get involved.

GL: A previous aspect of Streamtime dealt with web radio and poetry. Another is the promotion of free software. What responses have you heard from Iraqi bloggers about such ideas and activities?

CL: The Iraqi poets and journalists we became friends with in the Netherlands invite us when they organise or are involved in a cultural event, and there is always the option to stream what they do. When we streamed Iraqi poetry from Amsterdam to Iraq in October 2004, listeners were emotional, and it was a success. We also streamed from Amsterdam in January 2005 when the first Iraqi elections took place. We communicated by phone with people in Baghdad and other places in Iraq, plus with Iraqis in the diaspora; this was all transmitted. And indeed, we stream with the open source Dyne:bolic software, and we try to promote that. We are in dire shortage of funding, otherwise we would probably have done workshops in Jordan or elsewhere in the region.

Ideas on workshops with the bloggers, and the ideas and options to stream from Iraq, are met with enthusiasm by the bloggers. There are some small developments from this point of view. There is a great IraqiLinux User Group. Very active, intelligent, open minds, they just go on through all the war, and we have very good contacts with them. ILUG people are in Baghdad and abroad. They are very committed to the promotion of open source

software. I try to stimulate cooperation between IraqiLinux and bloggers. And there is of course the fact that in wartime many things are 'not available'; but in all the chaos, whatever is there could be considered 'open source'. People use and copy everything they can get their hands on. We have to remind the world that the web, free software and similar developments are still young in Iraq.

GL: In December 2005 you attended a meeting of the Global Voices project in London. Global Voices (GV) is a 'meta-blog' that monitors so-called 'bridge blogs' written by people who are talking about their country or region to a global audience. How do you judge this US initiative? Like Streamtime, they also support bloggers. What's the difference in the two approaches? Does it matter that you are continental European? What are the subtle differences with regard to how professional journalism, activism and blogging are negotiated on both sides of the Atlantic?

CL: I am glad an initiative like GV exists, and I am fascinated by it. But I can't grasp to my satisfaction the nature of the project. I can't see in which direction it wants to develop, if it has got a direction at all. "Who will finance Global Voices over time?" the Iranian blogger Hossein Derakhshan, also known as Hoder (he is now based in Toronto, and has a Persian as well as an English blog), asked during the London conference. Meanwhile, I was asking myself whether GV is about blogging the blogs and quantities of blog writing, or whether there is something more to it in terms of content. It didn't seem appropriate to pose such questions. GV is an experiment, like Streamtime, but on a much bigger scale. GV gives a 'massive' impression.

And in a way, the description I just heard of a 'glaze' over GV seems to fit. The question is: will this grow into a serious network, able and willing to challenge, in practical ways, issues such as the 'digital divide'? Could an initiative like GV transform into a cheaper way for big media corporations to collect information? Is it the fate of blogs to provide big media with free content? Will blogs become mainstream itself? Shall information flatten out instead of being given more *relievo*, as they say in Italian, more contour, dimension? What will happen to Reuters' stated wish: "We want to work more with the bloggers...?" And how can GV find ways to discuss such issues in a serious manner with associated bloggers?

At the Global Voices meeting, I told myself several times that I shouldn't let the format of the summit distract me from the content. But the co-founders Ethan Zuckermann and Rebecca MacKinnon led the summit in a tight format, in a way that could perhaps be intimidating for some. Seen with my European eyes, it was very American. It got on my nerves when Microsoft blogger Richard Scoble was introduced. He seemed to have just walked in for the moment when he would be saying something about himself and the company he worked for. So did he come to listen as well? Was he really interested in what's around? Why did he turn up? He is on the Microsoft payroll, and maybe he was the only paid blogger at the conference. Zuckermann and MacKinnon admit that it's a problem that big companies control too much of the web practices, but I felt a bit of a cold breeze when I

put my question directly to Scoble, about "corporate fantasies" and whether Microsoft wasn't more about *blocking* the internet than *blogging* the internet. Luckily, I saw Iranian blogger Hoder smile from ear to ear, which eased my nerves.

Instead of connecting blogging dots from all over the world, Streamtime zooms in on Iraq. Of course, 'Iraq' more or less involves the whole world, but Streamtime focuses on getting through to people's information that we don't know or hear about that easily. This is mainly done through direct contacts. Making direct contacts in the Iraqi context is not an easy thing to do. It takes time and a lot of effort to get through, to gain trust. And 'trust' in the Iraqi context is a very precious good. Our information is not only gathered from existing Iraqi blogs; the information is actively, and journalistically searched and gathered, and verified with various people in Iraq and with diasporic Iraqis, backed up with the stories of journalists like Seymour Hersh and Patrick Cockburn.

Especially, the issues of 'low-to-no-literacy' and of 'multi-linguality' are important for Streamtime. The flow of Streamtime is determined by shared needs, skills, knowledge and experiences of all involved. The design should be guided by openness, free publishing (copyleft), easy access, low-to-no literacy and multi-linguality. Free software will be preferred and stimulated. The web is a powerful and accessible structure, but web content remains fragmented. Streamtime wants to research, indicate, point to amazing stories of people who, against all odds, are building a new Iraq. We want to help break the media barriers, provide tools and knowledge for Iraqis to build their own radio broadcast stations, make programmes and exchange content.

GL: Apart from Streamtime, you're involved in an international network of investigative journalism. What do you work on, besides Iraq? Can you imagine being able one day to integrate blogging and journalism, and making a living from it? The economics of blogging is very high on the agenda of the A-list bloggers, the popular/celebrity bloggers in the blogging community. They all seem to be quite wealthy. Blogging is more and more becoming a full-time activity for some, but how someone can make a living from this remains a mystery ^a

CL: I have worked, and still work, on Italian issues. Some years ago I was a newspaper correspondent in Italy for the Dutch media. I also worked for Italian media. Recently I wrote a report about the state of investigative journalism in Italy. I presented the study at a recent event here in Amsterdam, where over 450 participants from 30 countries participated in the Third Global Investigative Journalism Conference. For a long time I have had a special interest in media restrictions, economies and in the political dimension of media. In Italy this is a big issue (one you won't find on TV). The influence of American media corporations throughout the Western hemisphere is huge. Its commercial significance is similarly huge. This also counts for the web. Concerning blogs, I am looking into possibilities to set up a project for Zimbabwe that is similar to Streamtime, but different. We know that Zimbabwe bought a web filter system (used for restricting online activity) from China, an example of

technology transfer in which giants like Google, Yahoo and Cisco are involved. While researching Zimbabwe I accidentally got involved in a Darfur blog: it had been set up only a week earlier, and was already mentioned in the *Washington Post*.

Old-fashioned newspaper journalism is still where my heart is, even though I like the mix of old and new media. I still follow the developments in the Italian G-8 court case. During the 2001 G-8 summit in Genoa, anti-globalists were beaten up 'Chilean-style'. One demonstrator died, the police violence was brutal. I monitor what happens in the turbulent but oh-so-quiet Netherlands, but it is difficult to locate publishers for my findings. Mainstream media is running after its own tail. The other day a colleague working at Dutch national public radio said to me: "You have done good research and gathered some fine facts to scoop with". The comment I had got from my editor, when I had approached him with these facts, was that no one had come up with this information yet. So I said to him, "Indeed, isn't that what news is all about?" Recently, after proposing an article to a national newspaper, I was told: "We don't have a freelancers' budget". Later that day they phoned me, and asked for an interview on the subject I had suggested to them. I accepted, for PR reasons.

I can't imagine making money through this kind of work. And I do not have the slightest clue about how bloggers will make money out of their activities, even though I have heard about rich wedding parties in Iraq being paid for with revenues from blogging...

Cecile Landman is a freelance investigative journalist who is also involved in various experimental media projects. Since 2004, she has been active in Streamtime, which aims at creating independent communication through the web between Iraq and the world. Streamtime is a project of Radio Reedflute in collaboration with Rastasoftware, developed with artists and activists from Iraq and the Middle East. It uses old and new media for the production of tactical media initiatives, content and networks in the fields of media, arts, culture and activism in crisis areas.

LINKS

Cecile Landman's blog: <http://xer-files.blogspot.com/>

Streamtime campaign: <http://www.streamtime.org>

Dynebolic software: <http://www.dynebolic.org/>

Iraq Blog Count: <http://iraqblogcount.blogspot.com/>

Global Voices: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/globalvoices/>

Global Voices London event: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/globalvoices/global-voices-2005-london-summit/>

Vereniging van Onderzoeksjournalisten (VVOJ, Dutch-Flemish organisation for investigative journalists): <http://www.vvoj.org/>

Locative Dissent

JEREMY HIGHT

The landscape is the map. Our histories of panic, of dread, of the disorientation of shifts and slippages, attempted erasures: all is a map. The advent of locative media art makes this possible. The nature of wireless signals and global position satellite data (GPS), as available in many laptops, PDAs and cell phones, is that it allows information to be placed in a location. The landscape can hold dissent, can reveal facts less known or even repressed in time.

A protest is an event that exists physically in a single moment in a single location, or in multiple locations. Then the crowd disperses, and the message gets voiced as best as possible through channels of dissenting voice, sometimes in bits and pieces in the mainstream media (usually as a blip, and with lowest possible numbers reported). The audio files triggered in a location are more permanent (for years, until the technology possibly becomes outmoded). The possibility exists that anyone with a cell phone can trigger the layers of a place as they pass through.

A location is full of unseen layers: in time, of events past, of places gone, derelict or even remaining, but with ghosts of former resonance, and memories of people. Place is an agitated latency; anywhere you stand has unseen stories and knowledge dormant beneath you. The cell phone can excavate the lost layers of what has come before, as signals triggers sounds, accounts, images and even video of what must be remembered.

A drawback is the fact that not everyone can afford a laptop, PDA or cell phone. This is a limit in terms of dissemination, to be sure. A way to circumvent this can be through funding raised by arts organisations and political awareness organisations to give tours and

community access with locative-enabled equipment. The voices of personal accounts of injustice, malice and tragedy, as well as positive accounts of struggle, empowerment, and community, can thus be heard, and facts can be sewn to places, to be seen and known.

An example of this in America could be a project at Manzanar, California, one of the internment camps of Japanese Americans in World War II. Between 1942 and 1946, this War Relocation Centre held over 10,000 Japanese-American detainees, both US citizens and resident aliens. The site now is a barren wasteland, with only a small visitor centre and a few derelict ruins of the temporary city/jail that held many people. The site is a sad metaphor for the American memory of what occurred. The dry, cracked earth and pathetic memorial is a further erasure and implication of deliberate suppression by forgetting. The locative project could be GPS-driven, and trigger all the accounts, images, maps, videos and tapestries of the individual stories of the many people forced to stay there in wooden shacks, living out the tragedy of internment and prejudice. The project, and thus the place, will agitate into life what must be remembered

The dissemination of knowledge can therefore move beyond the disconnect of books (read in isolation away from the physical place of the text's origin and gist), and move beyond the unfortunate ephemerality of individual protests. Multiple projects and efforts can be developed that trigger in the same area. This allows any variety of information and art to be available to many. The site-specific nature of a project triggering in a location allows many layers of place to be available to be read ; for example, a war in 1930, a tragic shooting of protesters in 1957, a town raised in 1968, a hazardous chemical spill from a multinational company in 1989^a

The work can be with scientists, historians, etc., utilising all types of information; or can be grassroots accounts of communities. The works can be oral narratives and text, mixtures of text and image, video, etc. The authority of the intellectual here is negated, but by intention. The authoritative voice of intellectual discourse is counter-intuitive to creating works that speak of place, events, moments, important layers of a place lost in time. Instead of the voice of authority, what is needed is the voice of the work and location itself: the information, the artistic use of language and image, and most of all, of the agitation into being of a location as multi-tiered, alive. The practitioner of locative media, by shedding the implied distance and finality of authoritative voice, has greater freedom to allow the account, the facts, the relevance and power of the place itself, to be felt with great clarity.

This is where the landscape can now agitate into being what needs to be known, what has been neglected in time, what has not seen the emergence of a voice as loud as necessary for it be made fully known. History is multi-layered, not just in archaeological terms in a sense of layers, periods and their artefacts, but in terms of what has been displaced and forgotten in the short memory of general culture.

History is told in many voices. Context shifts in time as well. The intellectual, the artist, the local citizen: what knowledge of events, moments, ways of seeing beyond the present and literal, do these voices have to implant in places, to be known and heard?

Stories can emerge from standing where a building decayed and was abandoned,

where an empty space now stands in the place of an event, a gathering, a human architecture broken in time. Turbulence can be the effect of the present, of the wash of information, of disinformation, of media bias, a blurred multiplicity. In time, that present can be seen more clearly, more wisely, more deeply, and even the quiet things and small voices can be heard as profoundly resonant and vibrantly clear.



Once upon a Flash

NISHANT SHAH

It was a dark and stormy evening. A young man in a dark blue Adidas jacket, collar turned up, eyes under green-black shades, hopped off a motorbike, tucked his thumbs into the front pockets of his low-slung retro jeans and surreptitiously made his way through a road thronging with rush-hour traffic and irate pedestrians yelping on their cell phones. He skipped across death traps with skilled ease: leaping over potholes, jumping over half-dug trenches, avoiding the occasional pair of doggy jaws that longed to mate with his ankles, ignoring the bikers who were using the pavements as new lanes for driving towards a honking traffic jam bathed in an orange and red neon that made the road look like a piece of burnt toast with dollops of vicious jam on it.

After five minutes of brisk walking, he slowed down as if he had reached just where he wanted to be; nowhere in particular. On his left were the large Acropolis buildings, towering over the world from their gated existence, structured in pompous Greek columns and façades of granite, stone and marble. On his right, on the other side of the road, if you looked over the metal head of the traffic, you could see the small roadside restaurant that announced fresh fish at cheap rates, sitting cosily under a starved-looking tree, happily encroaching upon the pavement, forcing the pedestrians to disembark, navigate the traffic and then come back to the relative safety of the footpath.

Caught between these two ironies, he stayed put for a while, glancing at his *chor bazaar* Rado model that flashed on his left wrist. He headed towards the mall that rose in glass and neon, false curves and studious lines across the quickly staining sky of a Saturday evening. As he walked into the mall, the automatic doors that sensed his corporeal presence opened

up for him, and the girl in a polka-dotted blue-and-red dress threw him the smile that desk attendants save for strangers. The gush of cold air-conditioned air and the noise of window shoppers greeted him to ease; mannequins in windows, draped in the latest fashions and various states of undress, winked at him; the smell of freshly brewed coffee came and enveloped him. He headed with ungrim determination towards the round performance area in the mall centre. Like many other hangers-out, he too loitered without apparent intent around it, just another boy out on a Saturday evening.

Suddenly his cell phone buzzed. His alarm sounded in loud tones to blend with the Britney Spears playing on the mall sound system. He fished out a bright bumblebee-yellow bandana and tied it to his head. As he did so, the performance area turned into a sea of people wearing varied shades of yellow, blasting their cell phone alarms at full volume till all you could hear was a grating disharmony that would have caused comment on a railway station in India. The phones soon faded, and a group of about 70 people formed a human ring, holding hands, their heads swathed in yellow, and sang at the top of their voices the first two stanzas of *Hum Honge Kamyab* ; the Hindi rendering of the famous protest anthem *We Shall Overcome*. Once the song sank into a bewildered silence, the people in yellow bandanas fell on their knees, raised their hands towards heaven and roared with laughter before quickly pulling off their headgear and dispersing, leaving an empty space and a gawking audience who just had their first dose of a 'flashmob' ; a group of people who assemble together, suddenly, in a public place, perform unexpected sets of choreographed actions and disperse without so much as a by-your-leave or with-your-leave.

Flashmobs trace their history to the period of early 18th-century industrialisation, when a group of women working in Australian labour shops¹ used coded messages to meet and discuss the problems they had in their workplaces. These meetings were organised at random, and the women used the very technologies of production they engaged with at work on a daily basis to fight the oppression and the injustice of the people at the top. The first modern flashmob, however, is attributed to Bill Wasik, editor of *Harper's Magazine*, who after the first failed attempt in May 2003 managed to pull a successful flashmob on 3 June of that year ; about 200 people swarmed over the mezzanine floor of the Manhattan departmental store Macy's, pretending to buy a 'love rug' for the commune where they supposedly all lived together. They left a bewildered audience of shoppers and a bemused store staff behind them.

Organise, congregate, act, disperse ; that is the anatomy of a flash mob. A polymorphous set of people are brought together through the commonality of subscribing to similar technological interfaces or gadgetry. Random e-mails, short messages (SMS) on cell phones, discrete messages embedded in public works of art or media, blogs and wikis, have all now been successfully used to conjure these tenuous group formations that temporarily transform the space that they arrive at ; flashsites ; into something that neither the audience they perform to nor the state machinery can comprehend. Thus, flashmobs produce that space in a condition of social and physical illegality.

In the Name of Fun

One of the most overarching icons of a globalised economy has been the credit card ; virtual money that has changed the way we think of money, capital and transactions. 'Visa Power!' as the advertisement goes, is looked upon as the quintessential rhetoric of economic globalisation, where the power to change and to create is manifested through the processes of consumption. While technology has been heavily implicated in the creation of this new invisible money, it has remained in the background. The swiping of the card ; the physical act of buying without 'paying' ; has become such a naturalised reflex that neither the technology it adopts nor the networks it creates are very visible. Flash mobs, however, in their construction, execution and ramifications, foreground technology as one of the most powerful tools of creating new formations of grouping and networking that, through their deliberately devised unintelligibility, transform the spaces they occupy.

This is an account of the first flashmob in India, and how it can be understood through the tropes of illegality, enchantment and transformation.

The story starts a little before the flashmob itself. In the year 2000, the policies of a shopping mall in Mumbai created a furore amongst the public. It was the first 'genuine' shopping mall in India. The first space that claimed mallhood was in Bangalore ; Kemp Fort ; but it was more a large store than a mall. This first all-American shopping mall in Mumbai ; Crossroads, with its promises of unlimited pleasure and brand-tagged shopping ; attracted the largest crowd in its opening week. Everybody wanted to see what the mall was like. Everybody was curious about this space. Everybody wanted to be a part of this exclusive zone that clearly demonstrated that modernity and progress had finally come to us.

Then everybody found out that they were not allowed to enter the mall. As its director pointed out in his interview with the *Times of India* (23 August 2000), "Crossroads is not meant for everybody".

At that time, when cell phones were still a novelty and definitely a curio for the upper classes, and pagers were still struggling for a mass market, Crossroads passed a stipulation which restricted people not carrying a cell phone or a credit card from entering the mall. If you were still eager to do so, you paid an extra fee of Rs 50 per head, and thus made amends for not carrying these mandatory items. This was the first time a 'public' space made it very clear that the public it was looking for and attempting to effectively create was not "everybody".

The issue was talked about, shouted about, screamed at and criticised by all wings of the media, who passionately analysed this instance of discriminatory practices based on socioeconomics. Later, a PIL (Public Interest Litigation) was filed against the mall; it lost, and had to throw its doors open to "everybody" who had been clamouring to get in ever since they found out they were not allowed to enter.

On 4 October 2003, the mall again came into the limelight in a manner it could not have imagined. This time the havoc was initiated by an e-mail. About 5,000 original mailers were sent off to people all around Mumbai and even beyond the city, asking them to have a look at a new blog for Mumbai flashmobs. The blog posted a form asking for name, e-mail

address and mobile number. On 3 October, several cell phones rang, asking people who had submitted their details in the form to check their inboxes. The eager participants glided to their accounts, to find a mail that agonisingly chalked out the time and space of the meeting venue ; a flashsite. The information was also sent by sms to all members who had volunteered.

And then at exactly 5 pm, a group of about a hundred participants entered Crossroads. They screamed at the top of their voices and sold imaginary shares belonging to Reliance India. They performed the *garba*. In the midst of dancing they all froze³ And then without so much as a word, after two minutes of historic histrionics, they opened their umbrellas and dispersed, leaving a trail of bewilderment and confusion, as an audience of over a thousand people watched with their jaws on the floor.

This was India's first recorded flashmob. A large crowd of people who did not know each other, did not have any largely political purpose in mind and did not really intend to extend the flashmob contact into more enduring relationships, got together to perform a set of ridiculous actions at Crossroads, thus marking it as the first flashsite in India. Ironically, the group that converted the mall into mayhem may be said to consist of those who information design and communications theorist Anne Balsamo describes as the "hyperreal" people ; those whose identities are created by the hypervisual and extra-physical aesthetics of the digital technologies that they deploy ; who were once the only legitimate owners of the space of that mall. This first flashmob sparked off many others all around the nation, most of them marking out spaces such as multiplexes, shopping malls, gaming parlours, body shops, large commercial roads and shopping complexes as their flashsites.

Bill Wasik, creator of the historic Manhattan flashmob, commented in an interview² that the flashmob experiment could be seen as a study in the behavioural psychology of "hipsters" ; people who would join 'new' or 'cool' things for no reason or investment other than to be visible in the current trends and social fads. To a large extent, Wasik's surface analysis seems to hold true. While flashmobs have been used as a political weapon by several groups and activists in many areas of human rights, queer rights, feminism, political democracy and so on, flashmobs fundamentally exist, like pre-Raphaelite art, for a more solipsistic reason. Bijoy Venugopal, who produced one of the most celebrated accounts of the Crossroads flashmob,³ asserts that it was all about having some "serious fun". Increasingly, flashmob organisers in and around the country disavow any ideological moorings for the gathering, and forcibly shelve it into the realms of entertainment or leisure. Following the banning of flashmobs in cities like Mumbai and Bangalore (*Mid-day*, 9 October 2003), even while invoking the right to freedom of speech and expression, both organisers and participants have largely produced justifications by claiming to have no political agenda, affiliations or inclinations in the construction or execution of flashmobs.

In this repeated disavowal of the political, one can read the desire for re-enchantment that flashmobs and mobsters bring with them. Flashsites, defined by the manifestation of flashmobs, are usually sites of globalised consumption ; an enchanted world of brand names and designer lifestyles that can make you feel as perpetually disoriented as Alice in

Wonderland. These sites serve as the symbols of enchantment in the logic of the city.⁴ The new urban enchantment and mode of fantasy is located in the circuits of consumerism where, with plastic money and unlimited credit, the consuming citizen can buy all that the heart desires. Flashmobs, formed outside these networks of consumption, and constituted by the same people who fit the bill of the citizen (as imagined and promoted by the state and the market as both embrace globalisation and its technologies), demand a re-enchantment of the city. They force us to acknowledge the need for such public spaces to be accessible to all, and provide a strong critique of the easily accepted globalised dream in which the state is now so heavily investing. Flashmobs become an instance of how tenuously-networked, fragile communities, their collaboration inspired and enabled by cyberspatial technologies, can contest the very forces that promote and proliferate these technologies. Flashmobs become a volatile stage upon which the drama of globalisation, consumption, governmentality and privilege is discursively and recursively enacted.

In the Name of the Law

That flashmobs are an embodiment of illegality is perhaps one of the easiest claims to prove. The very fact that the Mumbai Police, after the first series of flashmobs, invoked Section 37(1) of the Bombay Police Act in the name of security and safety, clearly indicates that flashmobs are considered outside the law in the most literal sense of the word. The then- Mumbai Police Deputy Commissioner of Police, Amitabh Gupta, contacted Rohit Tikmany, organiser of the first flashmob and moderator of the flashmob blogging community (www.mumbaimobs.org), asking him to shut down the site and stop all further attempts at organising flashmobs. Following the ban in Mumbai, cities such as Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Delhi have enacted similar bans within the city limits. These censoring forces look at flashmobs as potentially destabilising elements that can be 'misused' for violent acts such as riots, or bombings by fundamentalist organisations.

However, of greater interest is the extremely creative way in which flashmobs manage to reproduce flashsites in conditions of social and physical illegality by deliberate structures of transient unintelligibility. The leisure infrastructure of malls and multiplexes, cafes and large shopping complexes, gaming zones and other areas of consumer fascination are all aimed at the new citizenry that comes into being with these new urban economies falling into place. These spaces are not only legitimate spaces of self-expression through consumption, but also authorised spaces of public assembly and gathering. They promote an ethos of incessant consumption where the individual is also installed as a consumable product that relates to others in the processes of consumption. They are the locations where brands, accessories and lifestyles all come together as the figureheads of a sanitised economy ; which strives to make opaque the surrounding subcultures of piracy, theft, copying and distributing that defiantly and inevitably emerge around such nodal points.⁵ To belong to the space of a mall or a shopping complex, one needs to almost automatically endorse the original, the authentic, the expensive, as a way of making a conscious statement of style and lifestyle. These potential flashsites become the spaces

that the state legitimises and that the media promotes as the most visible and sanitised form of urbanisation in contemporary cities.

However, flashmobs definitely subvert the sanctity or the sanity of such spaces by compelling them to suddenly introject disruptive conditions of unintelligibility. Flashmobs force the other inhabitants of the space to enter a narrative of confusion, chaos and turbulence, thus rendering the concentrated zone of consumption incomprehensible for the short time that the flashmob unfolds. Moreover, flashmobs do not fall under globalisation's rhetoric of consumption, and do not require any special means of access or particular rites of consumption: thus, they defy the discriminatory protocols that such spaces put in motion under the uneasily hovering sign "Rights of Admission Reserved".

By rejecting the core usage and expectation of the space, and despite heavy surveillance, state opposition and hi-tech policing, flashmobs are successfully able to distort the formulaic narratives of the space, thus creating alternative structures of resistance, of transformation, of transition. State apparatus gets completely paralysed when faced with such a radical reconfiguring, and thus goes out of its way to put a special ban upon flashmobs in a city where even a small defeat in a cricket match, or various emotional events such a public mourning or celebration, bring together crowds much louder, more aggressive, mercurial and destructive than conventional flashmobs. The transient illegality that flashmobs generate is not only at the level of the law, but also at the level of legibility and comprehension.

"What do the mobsters do when they come together for a flashmob?" is perhaps a misguided question. While the actions of the group might be bizarre and lacking in meaning, often uninformed by any obvious ideology, flashmobs do produce new modes of signification and networking patterns, unprecedented in modern history. The ephemeral nature of flashmobs, the improbably pseudonymous identities of the participants, the technologically mediated communication and networking patterns, all hint towards a certain notion of technosociality, where the social world around us is profoundly affected by the technologies that we adopt. In their unexpected eruptions, flashmobs create a new relationship between actors, audience and the spaces that they inhabit, assimilating all three into the circuits of digital technologies. As a form of radical localised performance, flashmobs offer a way to question the hierarchical intentionality of the spaces that they transform; they embody new ways in which technologies interface with our daily lives, producing new signifiers and new forms of technosocial living.

NOTES

1. Labour shops were probably precedents of the contemporary sweatshops that are a characteristic of globalisation in the 21st century. These structures were large stone and concrete buildings that housed employees working round the clock in a brutal cycle of incessant production. Women and children were often preferred as employees, as they were paid less and considered more manipulable and malleable.
2. For Bill Wasik interview transcript, see <http://www.laweekly.com/ink/04/37/features-bemis.php>
3. For Bijoy Venugopal's blog entries on this event, see <http://www.rediff.com/netguide/2003/oct/05flash.htm>

4. In *The Nudist on the Late Shift* (1999), his spectacular analysis of Silicon Valley, Po Bronson discusses how in a post-industrial city, the quantifiable icons of enchantment and progress ; large factories, chimneys spewing smoke, and huge barricaded stone and iron constructions ; have given way to small and home-like offices which are almost human, and hence negligible. In his search for new symbols of enchantment, Bronson conjures the figure of the 'nudist on the late shift': an eccentric double billionaire who lives and works in a cubicle while he rides the crest of the IT boom. In the case of Third World countries like India, the symbols of enchantment may well be the new sites of consumption that are a consequence of globalisation.
5. One of the more exciting facets of digital technologies and globalisation has been the debate over property, ownership and theft. The easy duplication of brands and the bypassing of traditional circuits of distribution/sale of such products have created the glorified figure of the media pirate, who straddles the worlds of the legal and the illegal, the digital and the physical, the ephemeral and the tactical, with great ease. Indicators of the 'other' world of cheap duplicates and recirculated commodities lurk uneasily within the sanctuarised dimensions of malls and shopping complexes. There is a constant attempt to establish the original and the legitimate over the fake or copied replicas available in the grey markets around these spaces.



Pixels of Memory on the Hypertextualised 'I'

DEB KAMAL GANGULY

Reality: Causal or Hyperlinked?

Tsunami, 9/11, Katrina, 'Dreamed Fear' of WMD, Human Sculptures of Abu Ghraib, Worldwide Democracy Drive, Receding \$, Bullish Sensex Leaping over 9000, Starvation Deaths in the 'Left'-ruled State, New Clan of Suicide Bombers, Expanding Holes in Ozone Layer, Hydrogen Fuel-Driven Automobiles, Exponential Growth of Satellite Channels, Ethnic Cleansing, Ideological Genocides, Irrelevance of 'Cat's Colour', Human Cloning, Imbibing Hormone Codes of 'Other' Gender, Connection of Rivers, Thinning Cap of Polar Ice, Underdevelopment of Third World^a



^aall these overtly known front-page concerns are commonly felt signatures of a time of 'turbulence'. These 'issues' are being mapped by society's rationalist faculty over a scape of 'reason'. The mutual rational interrelationships between these aspects of concern are being studied over and over again. It is a familiar

framework to arrive at reason-driven solutions for a given problem at a given point of time. But those specific solutions for specific problems often seem to act against each other; they create self-feeding interlocking loops and generate newer eddies of turbulence.

Is it possible that the expected rational bonding between these signposts of 'current affairs' is just a perception, and that the relation of those 'affairs' might actually be something different from a chain of causal knots?

May we propose that those relations are something close to the multidirectional nature of 'hyperlinks'? And that, slowly, causal reality is transforming into a hyperlinked reality where, in defiance of Newtonian physics, more than one element can simultaneously inhabit a single point at a single moment, and a single element can reside simultaneously in more than one set of spatio-temporal coordinates?

Sounds like sci-fi logic! But we can always hire a quote to strengthen the situation: as feminist theorist Donna Haraway eloquently suggests, "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion"¹.

Multiple Centres of Consciousness

What would Gregor Samsa have 'metamorphosed'² into, if he were to wake up into a morning of a 'post-apocalyptic' year, say 2005 AD; the time when the words 'city' and 'digit' are verbs rather than nouns? Bruce Sterling's sci-fi novel *Distraction* (1999) might provide an answer, as cultural critic Steven Shaviro³ asserts in his discussion of a context where the protagonist is "infected with a virus that multiplies his awareness. It modifies his brain in such a way that he develops two separate centres of consciousness". This phenomenological disease (or evolutionary mutation), where the 'enhanced ability' of organic multitasking at the level of consciousness is the only symptom, creates a situation that, according to Shaviro, is "like having every television channel on at the same time". The consequent imperative for the human organism is very clear and categorical: to submit to an urge to retain and process more and more information within the organic interior.

This 'urge of the future' is perfectly legible if we consider the entire ideology of information technology for the last half-century. To put it simply: more information is better, mass-produced information is better. This speed of the movement of information, multiplied by its volume, creates an unimaginable momentum of information displacement, and the resultant void has to be filled up by overproduction of information. That phenomenon of 'overproduction' has caused the parallel phenomenon of 'information garbage' to crawl up and gradually take over the human mind. The bombardment of information happens through all the gadgetry possessed by the individual, and which link the individual to the world in audiovisual, verbal, sonic, graphic or textual forms. Eventually, due to this information overload, the mindscape of an individual is compelled to change. Through this intimate technology, s/he wants to cultivate more and more information: just for the sake of it, or perhaps to feel the loneliness of the self as it is swept into the midst of those torrential waves of data.

The Immortal 'Bit'

Today, each phenomenon is intended to be 'quantised'. Literally each speck of information is recorded and the information is stored in a computer, in a ceaseless process of direct quantification. We are also experiencing the tendency to quantify mental phenomena: EQ (emotive quotient), for instance, or pain index (threshold of endurance). Even biodiversity can be manifested through various numericals related to genome structures.

Thus, the sensory domain has been merged with the digital domain. The entire manifold of Cartesian space, the whole visible world is present to be televised, to be reciprocated in 'bits' of digital information. Whenever a digital bit is born, it throws up an instantaneous claim to 'immortality' through its endless potential for cloning. Without any generation loss, the probable, infinite replicas of that single digital bit would be floating virtually along the grid, seamlessly moving from a silicon-based digital network to a carbon-based organic network. Interestingly, the physiological counterpart of the digital bit might be the 'stem cell' (the present fascination of organic research), which by definition is a kind of 'generic' or undifferentiated cell that can make exact copies of itself indefinitely, and can become specialised for various tissues in the body. Cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's prophetic phrase with regard to mass media and long-distance communication aptly describes this new organic reality: it is morphed into "its own pure simulacrum"⁴.

The transference and storage of information in pre-industrial societies could hardly have taken place without the active engagement of human consciousness. In pre-industrial modes of mediation, information could be transferred only via an attentive faculty of human perception, such as hearing, writing, copying by hand, memorising, etc. Such specialised focus and skill is becoming unnecessary in today's age of 'mechanical reproduction': information can be replicated, literally infinite times, without any decay, through an interlocking autonomy of functions such as PRINT, SAVE, STORE, SCAN, BURN, COPY, PASTE, RETRIEVE FROM TRASH⁵. Thus, the explosion of information 'bits', and their infinite possible replicas with their inherent wish to be stored for eternity, have a lot to do with the degree of compression that the bit can sustain. The timeline of technology ensures the accommodation of information in smaller and smaller amounts of physical space. All the contents of the ancient library of Alexandria might be stored today in a palmtop system. This compressed information can only be decoded through technology, which has a direct bearing and powerful influence on human processes of perception.

Memory without a Past

To cope with the burden of information, we have already started sharing our sense of possession, retention and anxiety about personal memory (which used to be an integral part of the 'storage space' of the brain) with the 'memory' embedded in various gadgets or storage devices. "That's my home", we could rightfully say, wherever we lay our cell phones. It might shed some light on a recent incident when a girl in Delhi attempted suicide because she had lost her mobile. This may be seen as evidence that memory, one of the essential pivots of our existence, has become the most significant zone of bondage between the organic and digital systems.

A recent term for the new phenomenon of this memory sharing is 'life caching', the practice of using personal digital devices to document 'bits' of daily life. Today, virtually every activity, every communication, every moment of an individual's life can be recorded and stored. This digitised memory doesn't diminish with time; rather, with increasingly advanced technology, those digitised bits of memory might look or sound better through enhanced clarity and various kinds of manipulation. The ghostly presence of this enormous collection of imperishable 'objectified memory' saturates human consciousness with the overwhelming sense of a transient 'present', where the 'past' is nothing more than the memorised 'present', and the future is understood as a replicated 'present'.

The human condition dominated by the sense of a transient present was skilfully explored in the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Director Stanley Kubrick and scriptwriter Arthur C. Clarke visualised a state called 'hibernation', in which 'minimum life-supporting functions' (such as breathing once a minute) are monitored and regulated by a computer named HAL 9000. On the other hand, that computer was programmed to have a consciousness, could show emotive responses while communicating with humans, could even persuade them to not deactivate it. Is it just coincidence that we too put our computers into 'hibernation' when required?!

Non-Optic Cyberspace

According to cultural theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, cyberspace is of a "haptic" nature (as opposed to the optic), governed by "pure connection", accessible only in "close range vision", to be navigated "step by step", through an endless combination of hyperlinks.⁵ Due to the infinite possibilities of hyperlinked orientation, each visit to the same URL, when one sees the same webpage with the same web address, would also theoretically be a new space impregnated with newer possibilities. We start with a concrete search word, but often encounter the unexpected, and end up getting impressions about that word from different perspectives. While one set of data floats on the screen, the elision of data flowing from various hyperlinks creates an opacity behind those assorted fragments of frontal information. Thus, each bit of information may detach from its originary perspective, and possibly also from the ideological structures of human consciousness which have produced it. While navigating this "haptic" space, various cognitive skills are called upon to be used at various speeds (very fast reading and typing during a chat, or a long wait of dead moments while struggling with poor connectivity); thus, we operate within an ambiguous envelope of dispersed, pulsating spatio-temporality. At any given instant of our navigation in cyberspace, a layered sense of temporality flows at various speeds around our consciousness.

The televisual world, though principally engaging the organs related to visual and aural sensibilities, is best received from mid-range proximity. The influx of audio-visual information called 'televised reality', repeated in a loop 24 hours a day, serves beyond just the scope of providing information. It runs again and again; gradually the information element recedes for the faithful viewer, the constant onlooker. Rather, the scene becomes a hypnotising

spectacle: a huge repetitive cycle where 'reality' has been exploded into countless moving images of changing pixel patterns. In that televisual transaction, the 'real phenomenon' tends to become just a single chance among many other chances. 'Reality' is no more 'real' than an image with correct pixel information. Any change in the information would turn the 'real' visual with the mark of photographic reality into the 'unreal' realm of graphics. Today, in the visual world of TV or the internet, or in the spacelessness of a multiplex or mall where aspects of the architecture, texture and lighting often combine to induce a sense of disorienting homogeneity, we can observe our 'selves', our own images amalgamated with graphics and virtual images. The lines of separation and differentiation are merely a few numbers, some quantised information delivered via pixels.

In the mayhem of the contemporary affiliation with the visual, the 'real' can no longer keep up with the speed of the production and dissemination of images. 'Reality' collapses, fragments, and tends to recede into the form of a 'vanishing real', while we retain the temporal feelings of various kinds associated with it. These temporalities converge into the 'dead' moments of a slow computer, feeble connectivity, commercial breaks on TV; and we extend that phenomenological relation to our optic space as well. We shrug at the 'dead' moments of a journey from place to place; we arrange the dark glass of the window and pull the curtain to isolate us from the sight of moving and blurred space-scapes, thus infusing haptic characteristics into existent optic space. Like the 'dead' times in our navigation of cyberspace, we would also like to avoid the dead spaces in our journey from place to place. If only we could have been hyperlinked from one physical space to the other through the click of the mouse, or through pressing a button on the remote control⁵ If we could only skip off for a few moments from our corporeal existence! This fetish for tele-transportation might well be nurtured in a possible sci-fi scenario where humanoid characters would wear video-ed skins glowing with pulsating signals of electron beams, video tattoos; in place of nail polish there would be LCD display panels as 'nail-mirrors' (in Sanskrit, *nakha darpan*; these feature in some Indian folk tales as instruments of divination).

Post-Human Consciousness

The digital interface between 'reality' and the 'perception of reality' is on the threshold of new philosophical queries. The whole debate and dialogue between materialism and idealism in classical Western philosophy has entered a new era. The old couple of 'matter/form' is now substituted by 'digital/form', or from another perspective, 'electromagnetic medium/digital forms'. The famous hypothesis of 18th-century British empiricist philosopher George Berkeley; *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived), that the 'reality' we experience is a product of the brain's perceptual apparatus; is facing new possibilities of interpretation in the digital era. Today the brain is seen as an information-processing device, and 'real' things are programmes, which are able to create a perception in the device. Taking a cue from architect and virtual reality researcher Michael Benedikt,⁶ information science theorist Rafael Capurro remarks with conviction that "it is not the mind or brain that is being in-formed or im-pressed by external things, as the empiricists or

idealists postulated, but it is just the other way round"⁷.

The avatars of IT and cybernetics propose that information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates, carbon-made proteins (organic bodies) as well as silicon-made computer chips. All these developments point to a new age, namely the 'post-human'. The post-human view privileges informational patterns over the material. As a corollary, the embodiment of 'consciousness' in a biological substrate is seen as an accident, rather than an inevitability of nature. Therefore, there should be no essential difference between bodily existence and computer simulation. The network proposes and 'induces mass replication'. The inner organic 'network' of the human body, which supposedly is the cauldron for 'consciousness' and selfhood, is not something inner, integral and personal; it is kind of transitory information pattern containing all the possible data probabilities that are to be found on the networked grid. Such a mode of 'consciousness' would then be static and rigid only if it broke away from the larger information-communication network and made an autonomous loop in its stand-alone organic unit.

In the post-human schema, the organic human body is the basic material to manipulate, to replace with machines, and to which technological extensions are added. Advanced computer hackers are working on body-net projects: they wear digital gear as part of the body apparatus, experimenting with wearable computers, feeling a twin-ness with the machine: an overriding urge not to be a machine, but to be coupled with one, to replace the consciousness of 'I' (the individual human being) with that of 'We' (human individual + machinic add-ons). Those immersed in such projects cherish the vision of thinking/feeling 'machines' enabling a silent revolution, transforming human society into a cyborg society. In the contemporary world of technological mediation, where the machine and human beings spontaneously interact on the phenomenological level, almost all human beings are "gadget lovers"⁸, a bit cyborg.

Sculpting 'I'-Ness

While these 'otherworldly' perceptions are floating well within our vicinity in the realm of the real, let's look at the mirror for a moment. While performing this act as a conscious engagement, I was quite startled to find that I was making some strange observations about myself. When I say 'I', I still assert a unique individual 'I'-ness, and the sense of this instant is connected to my older versions of 'I'-ness by a distinct profile of memory, possibly created out of an older phenomenological practice.

Interestingly, over the last few months my sleep cycle has completed a full rotation over the 24 hours of the day. I felt dead sleepy at 6 am, 9 am, 12 noon, 3 pm, 6 pm, 9 pm, and so on. This unusual movement of my biological clock might hint at the consequences of being immersed in data from various media sources, each emanating its own temporal pulsations, over a considerable period of time.

In 2002, there was an explosion in the premises of a temple that is five minutes' walk from my residence in Hyderabad. I was not bothered much at that time, as I was not affected, and there were no casualties. But several weeks ago, while watching the news of

the 'terrorist' attack on the campus of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore (one killed, four injured), I suddenly felt a bit concerned about my possible vulnerability in the face of such an assault. Anyway, I carried on with what I was doing, a cooking experiment with a dish of chicken; meanwhile my memory suddenly connected the latest attack with the fact that the 'terrorist' group responsible for an earlier blast in Hyderabad was also being associated with the current shootout at Bangalore. The name of the group, mediated in a big way over the years, triggered a different relationship of the 'I' cooking chicken to the 'I' recalling the blast of three years ago.

Thus two very basic biological sensations, sleep and fear, are for me linked to the fragmented 'I'-ness experienced at different points of time due to differential engagements with the digital domain of media. It is worth asking whether one can assume so deterministically that all the moments of 'I'-ness are an integral part of one's cumulative feeling about oneself, or whether those experiences of self and its related emotions are contingent, transient, relative, born from a specific negotiation of one's organic entity with the digital universe, a negotiation that may not recur.

These non-deterministic clusters of human feelings might point to the fading of a discrete 'I', propelled by perspectives like ideology, morality, ego, unidirectional memory, a grand vision of the world, glittering metallic staircases ahead and upwards,⁹ receding at vanishing points to a utopia. Those fragments of splintered 'I'-ness may cluster and be regrouped, retribalised into a transient and volatile sense of 'We' (as happens in places of chance gathering, night clubs, discotheques). In a night-long high-energy session there is the psychological equivalent of buying a trip to amnesia, to clear the organic disc-space, to make way for one's future memory, with the permanent provision to store the essential organic memory systematically in the impartial space of digital memory units.

'Distraction' as Identity

If all the earlier paragraphs hint at a genuine possibility of multiple selfhoods existent within the individual, then it is also to be noted that the common relationship within those multiple nodes of consciousness is 'distraction'. The mental focus on one TV channel gets 'distracted' to the other channels by the push of a remote-control button; the curiosity of a cybernavigator gets 'distracted' from one hyperlink to other hyperlinks. Thus the 'distracted' mental process gathers information piecemeal, and over a period of time the personalised course of 'distraction' becomes synonymous with a person's unique trail of mental existence in space and time.

The deconstruction of an overwhelming and historic 'I' into multiple 'i's' would be a crucial contemporary phenomenon worth observing. Mirroring the perceptual relationships of the digital domain, the multiple identities/plurality of 'I'-ness might well incorporate the sense of 'otherness' in a different way. This felt 'otherness' does not necessarily reside outside the personal organic system; rather, the assumed wholeness of 'I' gets hypertextualised, with the mutual bonding of 'otherness' working in between those fragmented selves, even as all those different 'others' are contoured by the fragile, conventional structure of the intrinsic 'I'. In this

thin air of dissolved 'I'-ness and transient lump of 'we'-ness, only giant corporate houses of information production would stand tall, trying new networks of information for increased control within competitive information circuits.

Towards a Newer Haiku

The paragraphs above are loaded with repeated keywords: memory, consciousness, technology, digital reality. If the entire text were to become redundant for some reason, the images below might suffice to indicate the complex relationship between these signifiers.

Consider the still below (1) from *Shri Krishna Janma* (1918), one of many spectacular silent films made by the pioneering director D.G. Phalke. This image portrays the tyrant king Kamsa's head severed from the body, suspended in a limbo but with all functions of the brain intact. In terms of narrative, the scene depicts Kamsa's fear of a violent death at the hands of his nephew Krishna. Bringing this down from its mythological coordinates to the parameters of the present discussion, we would be able to locate two senses of time operating together within a single, almost two-dimensional, frontal space. The event of the 'future' is merged with the 'present' and the filmmaker's innovative visualisation symbolically represents the character's 'disembodied' consciousness, a signature of the collision of the mythical mindscape with the blinding glare of technology and modernity. The result is the unique phenomenon of the *deus ex machina* (Latin, lit. 'god from the machines').



1. 'Disembodied consciousness' in *Shri Krishna Janma*

In the pivotal junction of colonialism and modernity, the intuition of a spirited artist of the then-'new' age could easily imagine a split between 'consciousness' and 'body'. Technology is not objective: it produces subjective associations based on its interaction with various cultural positionings. The colonial premise and policy of using 'higher technology' for the

'development' of the natives often showed radically different and unexpected results in terms of usage. Phalke's era was the time of what I call the 'mythical appropriation' of technology. Indian myths abound in references to the state of disembodied consciousness. Earlier, however, this was a subject for intuitive understanding, not a literal condition to be gazed upon. Technology offered Phalke the opportunity to render this visible, thus shifting myths from the level of contemplation to the visceral, tactile domain. Earlier a site to be mapped by myths, the body now steadily became a site to be manipulated by technology. This visual manifestation/manipulation might be termed the 'cyborgification' of myth. Technology functioned as a translucent divide between colonisers and natives, both sides attempting to signify it according to their needs.

I am convinced that a profound 'split' has been achieved. We do not possess our bodies in the same way that our ancestors did centuries ago. The contemporary demand is to seek out new ways of 'merging', of melding consciousness with technology.

I will focus on a specific image by Phalke to highlight the phenomenon of dissociation. But prior to this, consider the following image (2) from a perfectly crafted film of 2000, the millennium year: *Memento*, directed by Christopher Nolan. The protagonist uses his body to remember things through the device of tattooing important information upon his skin; he photographs each encounter with other characters, as he is affected by 'short-term memory loss'. Human memory, an aspect of the self that is negotiated only along the axis of time in pre-industrial societies, in this case occupies a quantifiable amount of body-surface, a kind of definite Cartesian space, similar to the 'virtual memory' of a computer as it occupies a physical disc-space. In this film, organic memory has been externalised and dissociated from consciousness; the temporal perspective has been detached from selfhood, and as a result, memory adheres only to the skin. Deprived of the anchor of interiorised memory, the I is really a form of existence of diverse mindscapes floating without gravity within the organic system of the protagonist.



2. 'Memory' tattooed on skin in *Memento*

In 2005, the Tamil blockbuster *Ghajini* (3, 4) hit the Indian filmscape, with dubbed versions in other south Indian languages. The film draws heavily on *Memento*; the protagonist here is a person with no memory and similar disturbing mnemonic indicators tattooed on his body. Though the "montage of attraction"¹⁰ has been curved in *Ghajini* quite minutely following *Memento*, it is still a strikingly different film from the latter. The principal difference lies in the fact that *Memento* explores the 'mutation'¹¹ of the inner universe of the protagonist, while its Indian counterpart keeps the protagonist, with his strikingly special ability/quality, a social outsider till the point he becomes 'normal', while the story revolves round a familiar mythical plot of violence and vengeance.

These cross-cultural instances suggest a special interest, even in the public domain, about the changing coordinates of memory; of transformations in selfhood when the vast, conscious sense of 'I' erodes; much as mountains crumble into dust in the intestines of insects¹²; in this age of synchronicity/simultaneity and similitude/simulacrum; an age where, as Baudrillard puts it so evocatively, the "real" has a "hallucinatory resemblance to itself", and "all the referentials intermingle their discourses in a circular, Moebian compulsion"¹³.



4. The protagonist having a crisis of 'memory' and 'consciousness' is an 'outsider' to society in *Ghajini*



3. Body as container of 'memory space' in *Ghajini*

Before finishing, a haiku gathered from cyberspace may be floated to signify the virtual character of inexorably technologised 'I'-ness at this instant...

**FACELESS JUST NUMBERED
LONE PIXEL IN THE BITMAP
I ANONYMOUS**

NOTES

1. Donna Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991, New York), p. 149. Haraway calls the late 20th century a "mythic" time, when we are all "cyborgs", theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism. This cyborg is our ontological ground; it gives us our politics; it is a condensed image of imagination and reality both, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. The cyborg has no link with seductions to organic wholeness through an appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity; instead, the cyborg is irreverent, oppositional, ironic, impartial and completely without innocence. Haraway concludes that "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert".
2. Franz Kafka. *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Transl. Stanley Appelbaum (Dover Publications, 1996).
3. Steven Shaviro. *Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003, Minneapolis).
4. Jean Baudrillard. "Simulacra and Simulations". In (ed.) Mark Poster, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Stanford University Press, 1988, Stanford).
5. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987, Minneapolis).
6. See (ed.) Michael Benedikt, *Cyberspace: First Steps* (MIT Press, 1991, Cambridge).
7. Rafael Capurro. "Beyond the Digital". For online essay transcript, see <http://www.capurro.de/viper.htm>
8. A term used in the video *Razor's Edge* (2001), dir. Vipin Vijay.
9. Recalling an expression of the great Bengali 20th-century poet Jibanananda Das.
10. As termed by film scholar Tom Gunning, who proposes that during the early years of silent cinema in particular, films were acutely conscious of the gaze of the viewer, and hence were more a series of acts of display. Rather than develop a flowing narrative, these films capitalised on the array of attractions exhibited on the screen.
11. The experience of 'short-term memory loss' in *Memento* can be interpreted as more than a critical symptom indicating that something needs to be cured. It signifies a post-existential state, and the physiological/organic character is generated as though a mutation of this pervasive reality, somewhat reminiscent of the way disease manifests in David Cronenberg's horror film *Rabid* (1977).
12. Recalling an expression of the Bengali 20th-century novelist Devarshi Saha.
13. Jean Baudrillard, op.cit.

Playing Wild!

ANDREAS BROECKMANN



Das Komische wohnt, wie das Erhabene, nicht im Objekt, sondern im Subjekt.

Like the sublime, the comical does not reside in the object, but in the subject.

; Jean Paul, *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (Pre-school of Aesthetics) §28, 1804

Preface

What we understand about wildness today is highly mediated, so that whenever we start talking or communicating about wildness in words *or* images, we are always already in the realm of culture and its codes. We cannot escape the aporia that there is no way to *address* wildness directly. We can only speak around it.

This essay attempts to discuss the intersection of art, technology and wildness, and asks what the scope of 'going wild' ; the manifestation of untamed energies, be they natural, pathological or sexual ; can mean in a contemporary situation.

The text is based on a talk that was first given at DigiFest: Go Wild! in Toronto in May 2005. For its publication in *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence*, I have decided not to weave a

thread of references to the notion of 'turbulence'. Instead, I hope that in the new context, this discussion of 'wildness' will create its own, uncontrolled resonances and turbulences.

1. *being wild*

In a very general, etymological sense, the root of the Germanic word 'wild' is related to the word '*Wald*'; in English the word 'wold' is used for 'forest' or 'wood'. 'Wild' in this sense are those plants and animals that grow and live in the forest, they are those plants and animals which are *not domesticated or cultivated*. Wildness is that which is outside the realm of human culture, just as the terrain of the 'wilderness' lies beyond the clearing, i.e., beyond the part of the forest or land which has been cleared and cultivated.

The fear and excitement elicited by this wildness comes from the deep-rooted sense of danger that we associate with it. Our cultured home, camp and castle is surrounded by a twilight zone, populated with animals and hybrid beings that are as threatening as they are obscure. The werewolf, that hybrid between man and wolf, roams the dark border zone between village and wilderness. Wolf children who grew up in the company of animals point to the proximity of humans and animals because these children are not *mimicking* animal behaviour, but living *as* animals. In contrast, witches and shamans cross the boundary between human and spirit realms at will, a fact that keeps them in a powerful, often precarious, dialogue with the dangerous and wild.

The mythologies of many cultures show a high level of fluidity between humans and beasts. Think for instance of the many mythical journeys into spiritual realms as recounted by the Amazonian Indians; or think of Ovid's account of the 'Metamorphoses' that humans and gods undergo, turning into plants, animals, or dead matter. Or remember the movie *Alien 4*, in which the evil Alien monster child grows in Ripley's pregnant body. A dangerous, destructive *internalisation of the wilderness*.

Some of us may be thinking about wild sex, others may be wondering about the wild and wired world of the internet, of online games and multi-user dungeons populated by shooter-egos, shape shifters and code crackers. Or the thriving ecology of roaming computer viruses. A future army of nano-robots going haywire in our homes. And some urbanists talk of 'wildness' in relation to the excessive and uncontrolled growth and transformation of cities all over the world.

All these associations are difficult to pin down, but they drift around and mingle in our minds. What connects these phenomena is that they are generally not ascribed to some spiritual or demonic sphere beyond reality: what is wild is natural, and it belongs to this world.

The wild is always a potential threat to our livelihood, or to the stability of our lives. 'Being wild' also means that something *escapes any rules and codes*. This makes 'wildness' such a paradoxical thing to talk about: it is that which is *uncoded*, and which thus also escapes description. It is in excess of what we can understand and rationally describe. 'Being wild' is an excessive singularity, something that cannot be compared or represented. It is an excessive presence of an Other.

2. *going wild*

To 'go wild' implies that something was earlier cultivated, coded, tamed; and that this cultured entity now returns to a supposed state of 'wildness'.

It would be interesting to trace the origin of the notion of 'wildness', which emerges as the Other of human culture. In that context, we could explore the history of the cultivation of land and the domestication of animals. What are the rules and structures that humans have imposed on nature in the course of cultivation and domestication? What does it mean to 'tame' another being? Does it mean forcing my own wildness, my own will, onto you? When I get 'tamed', does it mean that I get forced into something or somebody else's wildness?

For now, I will leave this thread aside and look at the reverse movement of 'going wild'. This assertive statement expresses a desire to transform what is cultured into uncoded nature: a desire to *become wild*. This may be reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's extensive discussions of becoming-other, becoming-animal, becoming-woman and so forth, in their book *Mille Plateaux* (1980). In their theory, this movement of becoming-other is connected to transgressing the logic of identity and self, and to the desire to morph into something that is unbounded, transgressive and multiple, a 'body without organs'.

Think, for instance, of Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* (1851), in which Captain Ahab in the end seems less obsessed with killing the white whale than with becoming the whale. Not becoming 'like' it, not emulating it, but actually becoming the whale, either by replacing it, or by becoming part of it.

An equally dramatic account is Franz Kafka's 1919 story *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie* (Report for an Academy), in which an ape explains its gradual, and tragically incomplete, transformation from animal to human. In a more assertive vein, in 1913 Kafka wrote *Wunsch, Indianer zu werden* (Desire to Become An Indian), a story only one sentence long, in which he imagines the transformation from human into animal:

Wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre, gleich bereit, und auf dem rennenden Pferd, schief in der Luft, immer wieder kurz erzitterte über dem zitternden Boden, bis man die Sporen ließ, denn es gab keine Sporen, bis man die Zügel wegwarf, denn es gab keine Zügel, und kaum das Land vor sich als glatt gemähte Heide sah, schon ohne Pferdehals und ohne Pferdekopf.

If only one were a native Indian, instantly alert, and on a racing horse, leaning against the wind, and kept on quivering jerkily above the quivering ground, until shedding the spurs, for there were no spurs, threw away the reins, for there were no reins, and hardly saw the land in front as a smoothly shorn heath, already without a horse's neck and without a horse's head.

What, however, does it mean to 'go wild' in our contemporary world? Which wilderness are we talking about? In our distorted world, we think of animals as endangered species, precious

carriers of bio-patents, protected and guarded on this global extinction zone into which we humans have turned the planet. So desperate are we to ensure the survival of 'wild animals' that we are prepared to grant them 'human rights'. Or we think of animals as mere material churned over by the food industry, un-dead fossil matter counted in calories and nutrients.

Going wild? Or 'going wild' as in sex? You don't need to read Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1976), or study the theories of Jacques Lacan, to know that sexuality is a highly regulated and coded system. Sex tourism and the pornography industry turn 'wild sex' into a commodity that seems easier to *buy* than to *have*. Against wild nature we construct dams, fences and tsunami warning systems. The only 'wild card' in the global ecology game these days seems to be the speed at which human destruction of our natural environment is eroding the viability of our life on Earth.

An art project that dramatises this boundary between control and danger is Dutch artist Erik Hobijn's *Delusions of Self-Immolation* (1993). Also termed the 'suicide machine', this installation allows the participant the extreme experience of *almost* burning to death, with a flamethrower being shot at the well-prepared and protected body. A second later, the platform on which the participant stands turns around, and a second valve shoots a gush of water, extinguishing the fire and cooling the heat immediately. The experience itself is, reportedly, highly dramatic and takes you to an existential threshold. More important, though, than the actual flash, which only takes a second, is the lengthy preparation of the body with fire-resistant gel, a ritual that takes up to one hour. It is this preparatory ritual that holds the *imaginary power* of the art project ; the fatal impossibility of simply 'going wild' and giving oneself over to the fire.

Even from a less drastic perspective, 'going wild' raises the crucial question of the boundaries of our cultural experience. Where do you find anything that is uncoded, unbarcoded, unpatented, offline, out of range of your GPS tracker, code-resistant? Which of us can come up with a genuine conception of 'wildness', one that is not mediated by television, tourism, and consumer culture?

Remember, for instance, the much-noted performance of Yugoslav artist Marina Abramovic at the Venice Biennial in 1995, the year of the end of the genocide in Bosnia; for a week she sat on a mountain of animal bones, ritualistically scrubbing them, performing the impossibility of cleansing the horror of war.

In our hunger for 'wild' stuff, we seem to be doing the exact opposite of 'going wild': posing as radical and transgressive, when all we can actually handle is a controlled experience of the border from inside the encampment. Those who overstep the boundary, either by resisting consumption or living in uncontrollable excess, are written off as a danger to public security. Discussing drugs and the social regulation of ecstasy, Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling argues: "The Achilles heel of the info-capitalist society of consumption sits at the intersection of excessive consumption and the regimes of public order: as soon as the usage of means and substances no longer takes place along controllable public trajectories, and as the ecstatic excessiveness of consumption cannot be socially reinvested, then addiction is not only counter-productive, but even subversive".

By analogy, we can conclude that *so long as* the usage of 'means and substances' *does take place* along controllable public trajectories, and *so long as* the ecstatic excessiveness of consumption *can be* socially reinvested, then addiction is not only *productive*, but even *affirmative for the public order*.

The Dutch writers' collective ADILKNO, when discussing "The Alien and its Media", have suggested that such cultivated wildness or evilness mainly serves the function of aestheticisation: "The sublimation of evil into the sublime intends to *confine the alien's dangerous unpredictability to the aesthetic experience of the uncodeable*, to be consumed within an institutional framework".

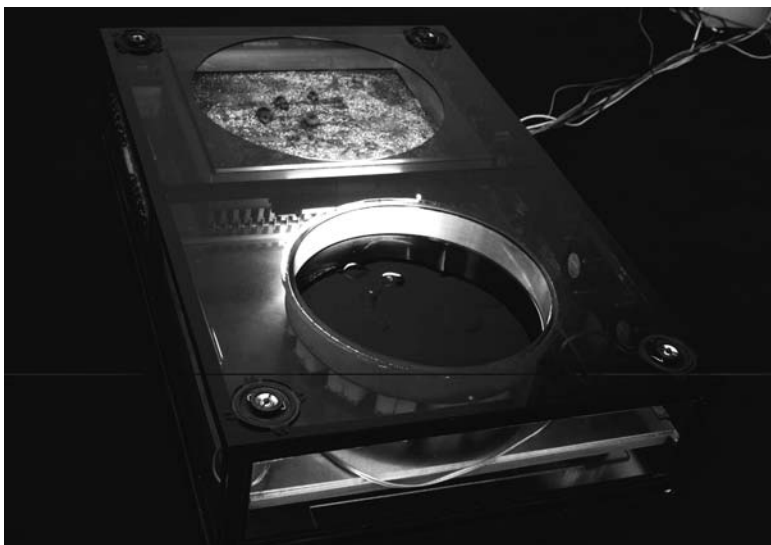
Is this the limit of the project 'Go Wild'? Can it take us to places *other than* the fake West of Marlboro Country? A 'Wild' West that has turned into cruel folklore, justifying selective lawlessness as part of the 'American Way of Life'?

When talking about wildness today, forget nature! 'Going wild' in the sense of going beyond culture is impossible. We know that we live by and in code; we are created by codes. Wildness today is human wildness, at times sublimated as the wildness of machines. The beast is inside of our culture, inside the code.

Yet, what benefit might an aestheticised, or committedly 'aesthetic', experience of the 'uncoded' hold? Is it even possible to think of something like 'wild code'?

3. *wild machines - animal spirits*

It is useful, in this context, to introduce the notion of 'animal spirits' to our discussion. Artists have explored the field of the animatic and the freeing of its energies, for many years. Media art, often thought of as a cold, mechanical, technology-driven field of artistic exploration, has frequently transgressed the assumed rationality of the machine. The dangers and the ugliness of the 'machine spirits' have been explored as intensely as the pleasures and beauty they may elicit.



One example of a recent art work in which the boundaries of life and artifice are tested is Austrian artist Herwig Weiser's installation *zgodlocator* (2000). In a plexi-covered well or basin we see an artificial miniature landscape made up of metallic fibres and granules, taken from recycled computers and other technical hardware. This 'beyond' of our techno-paraphernalia is animated by means of a grid of strong electro-magnets underneath the basin. As the magnets are activated, the metallic fibre stands up in surreal, quasi-natural configurations, vibrating and emitting sounds, as though they wanted to come alive. The magnets can be controlled individually, so that moving patterns can be drawn into the metallic landscape, animating it.

'Animating' here implies both the sense of creating an impression of self-generated movement, and of giving the material an artificial soul.

Animal spirits (*Lebensgeister*, in German) are the media that connect body and mind ; at least that is how Enlightenment thinkers sought to overcome Descartes' idea of their separation. In the cybernetic thinking of the American mathematician Norbert Wiener and others, the relationship of animals and machines was first thought of in the Cartesian sense of the animal as mechanism: the animal body as a mechanical, dynamic contraption with pumps, joints, internal information systems. Later, this metaphor changed: from the animal treated as a machine, it became the machine treated as an animal. The root of the word 'animal' is the Greek *anima* (spirit and breath). Animal spirits are thought of as the ambiguous, yet powerful sources of energy that feed inanimate matter. The Golem in Jewish folklore, Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) and Fritz Lang's science-fiction film *Metropolis* (1927) are examples of works that have scared and fascinated people through the theme of the inanimate/machinic coming alive, and 'going wild'.

These *animated machines* articulate the ambivalence with which humans see themselves as both the *masters* and the *victims* of technology. More than anything, the reason for this ambivalence is that our technological culture is a *culture of excess*, a culture that thrives on offering more than we can handle or stomach. Wildness in this culture is frequently associated with violence, and the respective forms of violence are not 'wild' in a natural sense, but are signs of the wilderness within our culture, whether in the media-dependent war scenarios, whether in the hooliganism of a fully commodified sports industry, or in the violence against migrants who are the 'media' ; i.e., key means of communication, production and transformation ; of a global, hyper-mobile form of capitalism. We all remember the images of the sadism within the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq ; how do we interpret the wildness of those scenes? Whose *Apocalypse Now*? Whose *Heart of Darkness*?

Artistic interventions in this domain are precarious because, like the "witch's apprentice" of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem *Der Zauberlehrling* (1798), they have to deal with the spirits that they call, and that easily go out of control. However, such interventions can broaden our horizons by confronting a technological culture that embraces these excesses and contradictions blindly, and hides its *heart of darkness* behind the smokescreens of slick and functional surfaces.



4. *coding wild*

If we locate the wilderness in the very code of our culture, then we can think of any form of excessive coding, from programming computer viruses to hacking into supposedly unbreakable security systems, as forms of 'going wild'.

How, then, can we imagine such 'wild code'? As early as 1994, German media theoretician Siegfried Zielinski suggested, "For art, it would be worthwhile to attempt to invent algorithms of (self) squandering, of faltering, of ecstasy, and of (self) destruction as an experiment".

The internet- and software-based work by the Dutch-Belgian group Jodi has managed to deconstruct the codes of browsers and computer games in ever new, challenging ways, by twisting the software and aesthetically exploiting inbuilt bugs and deficiencies. In a different mode, the Austrian artist team of Margarete Jahrmann and Max Moswitzer are meshing and mixing different layers of code and coded interaction into complex, hybrid environments that extend our understanding of networks and online behaviour ; by, for instance, translating online interactions from textual to abstract sound levels, or into other, automatic events, which in turn become represented as physical objects. And in his generative



software and video work *L'Invention des Animaux* (The Invention of Animals, 2000), the Quebecois artist Jocelyn Robert programmed a short video sequence of an aeroplane in such a manner that it seems as though the plane is trying to develop bird-like behaviour, chirping electronically and shaking its pixillated wings ; the wonderfully paradoxical image of a machine trying to become an animal, to go a little bit wild.

The underlying concepts of such artistic strategies were introduced 80 years ago by the Russian literary scholar Viktor Shklovsky and German writer Bertolt Brecht through the Russian term *ostranenie*/the German term '*Verfremdung*', i.e., 'making strange', 'defamiliarising'. More recently, anthropologist Michael Taussig has argued for what he calls 'mimetic excess', i.e., a form of mimicry fully aware of the codes of what is being represented. If we understand 'going wild' as a form of 'mimetic excess', as a form of appropriating the codes and rules of culture and turning them upon their head, through dramatising or exaggerating them, then we might not be the sheepish victims of a technoculture that pushes us into its wilderness, but we might in fact become wild subjects of those very codes which define us.

I would claim, by way of conclusion, that 'wilderness' remains a question of territories, even in an age of virtual and highly mediated spaces. Talking about the possibility of escaping social codes, Foucault has used the term "heterotopos" to describe sites such as islands or ships: places where the social rules associated with states and territories are not in force, and where different behaviour and different relationships can emerge. The Australian philosopher Brian Massumi has argued that in order to find such sites of escape, or autonomous zones, it is not necessary to go out into 'wild nature', but that it is possible to find these places in the interstices of urban culture itself: "...they are where bodies in the world but between identities go: liminal sites of syncretic unorthodoxy".

These 'wild zones' have their less appealing equivalent in the in-between zones that nation states create in order to isolate 'undesired' people. While places like prisons still fall under the given legislation, there are new areas in which people can be kept without being able to make claims to their human rights, the protective shield that enlightened modernity gave to its citizens. When you now enter an international airport, you pass through an exterritorial zone in which you are formally not recognised as 'having arrived', so that you might claim your right to asylum. A similar scenario has been explored recently in Steven Spielberg's movie *Terminal* (2004), in which a traveller called Navorsky is stuck in the limbo of the transit lounge.

This type of wilderness is also explored in a recent work by the Austrian-German artist group Knowbotic Research. In their project *naked bandit/here, not here* (2004) they analyse and transcode the legal scenario in which sovereignty is defined not by reference to a territory and related legal codes, but by the sheer ability to control behaviour. Similarly, enemy combatants in Guantanamo Bay are under the sovereignty of the US army without being allowed to make claims to the rights that they might have if they were on formally American territory. Such an exterritorial, juridical 'wilderness' can be declared by law, creating zones or encampments where the rules of civilised behaviour are off-limits.

In Knowbotic Research's installation, a silver-coloured blimp equipped with a simple vision system can autonomously fly around, recognising and attacking black balloons hovering within the space. The strongly coded behaviour is defined by a clear power relation that, however, can be interrupted by the audience through a symbolic intervention at the level of the code that controls the interaction. In one version of the installation, the script of the computer code has been painted on the wall in an expressive style that contrasts with the cold logic of the programme, yet articulates the 'wild' openness of the represented relationship.

'Wildness' has become a metaphor for the escape ; for better or for worse ; from an overly regulated and structured world in which technologies of control are increasingly mediating human communication, behaviour, and the way we can socialise in public, often in the name of 'security'.

The American information theorist Wendy Chun has recently made a strong claim that instead of demanding ever more security and control, we should insist on our freedom as individuals and as a society; and for that, it may be necessary to construct technologies and develop systems that are vulnerable, systems with which we can live because they are vulnerable.

It can be done. In the code.

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Download Downtime

TREBOR SCHOLZ



I. On my way to Zurich I met a colleague at the airport. We both fly routinely. I can't do it anymore^f, he said. All this air travel is just too much downtime for me^f. I moved onward, passing through airport lobbies in New York City, London, and finally my Swiss destination. In these in-between spaces I was persistently confronted with big, fat, backlit ads. And they were all about time. T-Mobile's slogan is Upgrade your downtime^f. The airline Jetblue draws attention to their wireless hotspots at John F. Kennedy airport with the commanding downtime-download^f. The mantra of the British company Vodafone is: The power of now!^f BT shows a jolly businessman fly-jumping through what looks like a landscape of Powerpoint charts: The digital network economy. Where business is done^f. At Kennedy airport, Sprint, the American telecommunications giant, set up yellow placards the size of a house, that urge you to say yes to making just about any place a workplace^f. It made me stop. I was baffled. How dare they be so in-the-face about the agony of immaterial labour?

Before moving to San Francisco, I had never heard terms like quality time or downtime. In East Germany, for me, time was just time indiscriminately. For a wide variety of reasons, there are many who pledge allegiance to everything not-networked, offline, and non-digital.

Who can blame them? Post-Fordist work conditions turn the super-mobile manager into a networked lapdog. At six in the morning, those waiting in the airport gate area pull out their laptops. Sneaking a glance over their shoulders, I see spreadsheets. The networked early morning workday starts with coffee and a cheese-and-egg-pizza. Downtime now is download time. Life is work. There is not enough time to rest, cook, reflect, or walk in the woods.

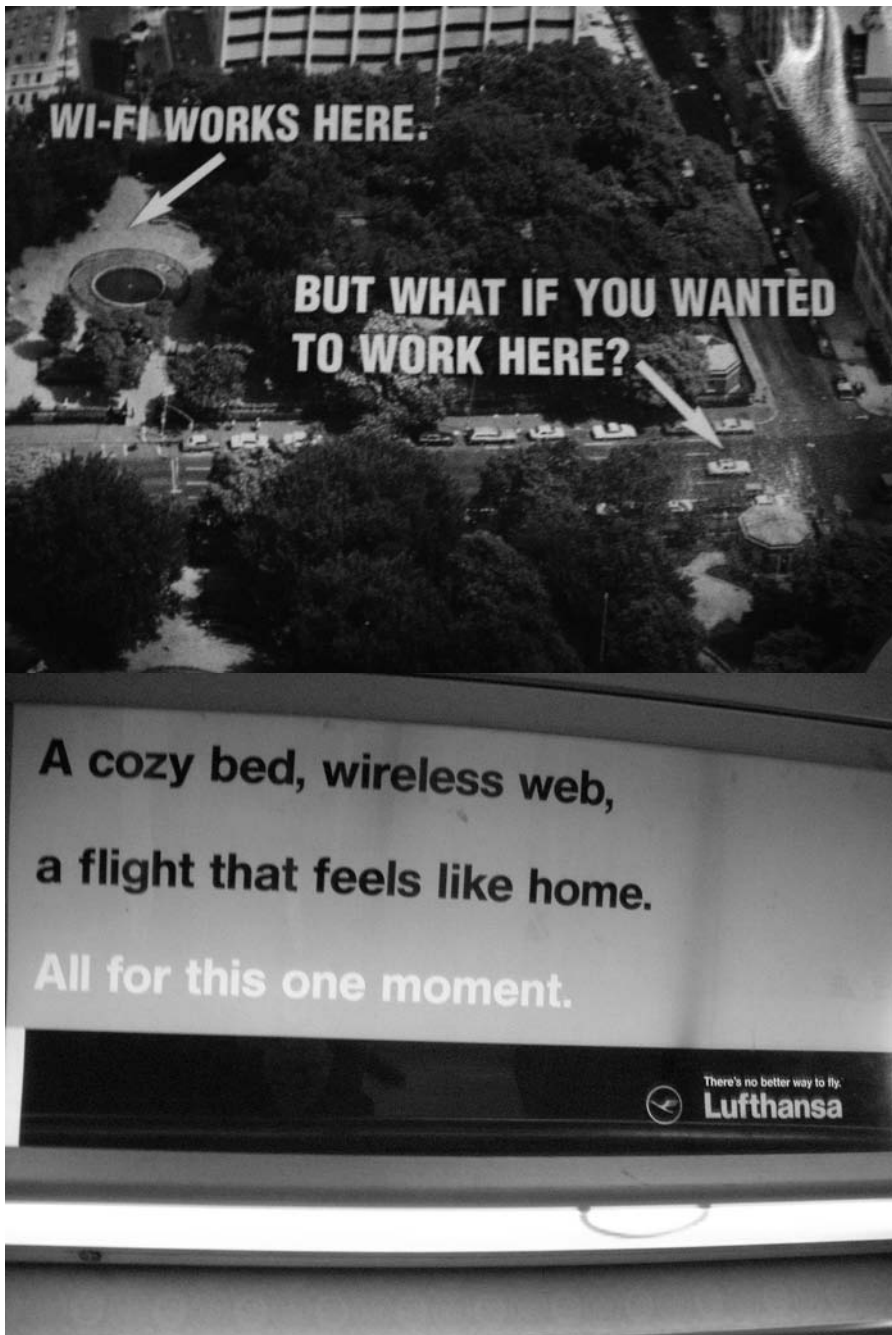
The insidious penetration of the internet into our every grain is hard to deny. Workers become part-of-the-solution nodes rather than full-time employees. Health insurance can be done away with. Wages in the immaterial networked realm don't have to bear resemblance to the work that was delivered. And who ever mentioned pensions? Also, unions get whacked when the workforce is geographically pieced together. Then there is the feminist art critic and theorist Lucy Lippard, who appeals in *Lure of the Local* (1997) for a return to a sense of place. But the widespread, uprooted lifestyle against which Lippard as well as the late urbanist Jane Jacobs argued seems like peanuts compared to what is happening now: the horror, the horror.

Passing through these airports, the net has started to feel like an itch that we can't scratch.

Much of the current discussion about networking is in the service of big business, written in large part from the position of a consultant for the amazon-dot-coms of this world. What's wrong with that picture, you may ask? Well, let's just say that there is a utilitarian impetus that rarefies play and experiment, at least if they don't link up with business interests sooner rather than later. Let's add that I hope for people with insight into network technologies and their human uses to also take on projects that do not support those who already have plenty.

Some cultural workers have much in common with managerial networked types. Cultural theorist, translator and activist Brian Holmes points to that in his 2002 essay *The Flexible Personality*. It's not just the creative class's rock star who sits in business class. Next to him/her, the smiley jet-set manager is perched. Artists become entrepreneurs of themselves. Self-worth is quantified in frequent flyer miles and in the numbers of invitations. But the opportunistic, ego-tripping art entrepreneur is not all there is. Cultural practitioners travel all over the world to perform their ideas. They are gift-givers, with all the problematic hierarchies that this creates. On good days they enact their ideas with passion, inspiration and substance. The Brooklyn-based artist Martha Rosler documented her more-than-frequent passing through airports in many series of photographs and critical writing. She describes her motivation for these works related to her occupation. She travels to far-off conferences, and museum lectures. And in new media as much as in photography, the international scenes are closely knit. Travel is a substantial part of the lives of cultural producers. I can't point to the travelling managerial networkers over there. They are not so very distant or conveniently different from me. I don't have all the ethical and political righteousness on my side: I am part of the picture. The managerial network beast also lives inside of me.

We move through space. We are all those cultural producers who fly thousands of miles to talk to different audiences or to exhibit artwork. We are quite the experts when it comes to



travel. We know it all. Airport, home, gallery, and lecture hall are equally familiar venues for us. We have it down. We know how to block off obnoxiously loud fellow travellers. We recognise how to remain friendly (most of the time) with borderline-abusive security personnel. We inhale every magazine article about tricks of air travel. Our bodies are transported through the air. While we are resting, our eyes are closed, covered with masks. We enter into think space. We know what to do about the lack of humidity on planes. The increased elevation at take-off jazzes us up. We know when to stretch and which way to rotate our ankles. We have developed a continuity of purpose that makes it secondary where our bodies are located. Transitory scenarios through which we move don't distract us anymore.

We re-purpose trains and airport lobbies into offices. The person next to us becomes unwillingly involved. We pull ourselves out of the public into the private networked space. We shift through the walkways of airports, rush forward in taxis and trains. Networked devices keep us always anchored, always in touch, consistently connected to myriads of social networks. Their smoke signals are loaded into our pockets. But the flickering screens to which we are hooked are not just the Bluetooth lifelines to the boss. We have all those with whom we share our lives in reach nearly at all times. We cannot feel the warmth of their faces. We cannot touch them. But in our downtime, we can talk or exchange text messages. And doing so may prevent us from talking to the stranger right next to us.

We grow network tentacles (like air roots) that allow us to be always on. There is the perpetual, invisible link between our body and the nearest cell phone tower. Imagine if you could see all these connections shooting like lasers through the air. We are always plugged in, interlinked at all times. In the city, at the moment when the subway train comes out of a tunnel to go over a bridge, dozens of people who endured at least 15 minutes of out-of-reach time pull out their devices to feel reassured that they did not miss something. The technology is not plated into us. It is miniaturised. The only piece of hardware that new media provocateur Lev Manovich mentions on his blog, for example, is the I-Go, a universal connecting plug for all kinds of devices. It allows him to leave the cable clutter at home. Our nano-sized multipurpose devices are not what count. What matters is the linkage that they establish. The wireless internet signals casually picked up by our laptops facilitate exploitation. We have to look hard to see the emancipatory nature of socio-technical networks. But it's on the edges of network culture that the sun sparkles. It's not in the centre of pesky business culture.

*Sociable web media*¹ cannot be reduced to instruments of oppression and casualised labour that squeeze every last drop of genuine energy and creativity out of the worker. Such media are not, by default, networked assembly lines. The Treo smartphone is not evil. Laptops are not merely locative Wall Street devices. Cell phones are not the pervasive enemy. Groups of protesters at the Republican convention in New York City used them to escape police tactics. But by the same token, networked technologies are also not inherently linked to a deviant life style or oppositional cultural practice. Technologies define us. We are conditioned to relate to them in predefined ways. Our use of technologies changes what we know and how we know it. But we do have a say in this. We can shape and reverse assemble the technologies that we are using.





Sociable web media do not have to stand for servitude. We can visualise uses of technology that meet true human needs. We can support emerging alternative socio-technical networks through reflecting on technologies without utopia-glazed eyes. Critiquing the venomous impact of networked, neo-liberal managers is vitally important. But don't stop there. Don't leave the discourse about sensible uses of sociable web media to the managerial rulers (or to them inside of us).

II.

After anecdotal reflections about time and self-governance in the networks, I turn here to formulating the multiple domains and impacts of sociable web media, which has proved to be a double-edged sword.

The World Wide Web is naturalised in today's United States. One need not subscribe to the rhetoric of network salvation: technologies will not save the planet. But a critical attitude cannot ignore the World Wide Web either. There are innumerable ways to resist the networked condition, but the Che Guevara rhetoric of radical mutiny is futile. The closed, raised fist is empty. The fingers bent in toward the palm and held there tightly do not signal a blow anymore. In north American cowboy country, even Homer Simpson wears a Che Guevara T-shirt. Today, the radical politics of Che, the Argentine medical doctor who took off into the Bolivian jungle, mostly represent neo-liberal catharsis. Counter-cultural gestures are rapidly absorbed by the event-culture of the spectacle. Culture jamming and tactical media are quickly assimilated by the capitalist spectacle. Green fields of complete autonomy, however temporary, become increasingly harder to imagine, and hybrid ecologies are unavoidable.

Where are the millions who are desperate enough to put their lives in jeopardy for a revolution? In the US, such political upheaval cannot be simply cooked up. The affect of a vast number of people here is muted by consumption, lies and information overkill. False hopes about class mobility and variants on the myth of the American dream are downloaded daily. The multitudes here work boundless hours, stay poor, and are without health insurance. Distraction flattens feelings of boredom, fear, and anger. The disjointed desperation of workers who are not place-bound remains inconsequential. Their disappointment, anxiety and aggravation do not boil over. Citizens blame themselves if their emotional life goes haywire. Self-help, psychopharmaca and psychotherapy are recommended destinations for the afflicted, sources of support that can reshape the individual as a functional (working) member of a non-functional society.

If there is a revolution under way, then it is these technologies that shock us into a novel paradigm, that of a *revolution of relationships*. Sociable web media allow for new interconnections, often relating those who share similar emotions and interests. Affect becomes more visible and connected. It can be mobilised online. As stated by Oxford University professor Nigel Thrift:

^afor Plato, art was dangerous because it gave an outlet for the expression of uncontrolled emotions and feelings. In particular, drama is a threat to reason

because it appeals to emotion... these knowledges are not only being deployed knowingly, they are also being deployed politically (mainly but not only by the rich and powerful) to political ends: what might have been painted as aesthetic is increasingly instrumental.²

Michel Foucault's notion of biopower describes bodies as being politically regulated by a series of technologically embedded, disciplinary interventions. The insertion of a blip, a high-pitched brief interruption, is critical. Today, robust resistance is about time, about embodied and technological networks, about self-governance and the politics of affect.

The ruling class seeks always to control innovation and turn it to its own ends³, argues digital communications theorist McKenzie Wark. While utopia is usually the first association with sociable web media, the World Wide Web is an example of how technologies

can be *reverse-engineered* to be used against the intentions of their inventors. Despite the military-industrial roots of the internet, examples of ironically cybercommunist uses and alternative economies of gifting, sharing and commons-based production are noticeable all over the Web. Such alternative economies must clearly irk the masterminds of the original Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.⁴

The stereotype of the white, obese, socially alienated



teenager spending hours on end typing away on his computer in the basement needs to be countered. Pointing to the phenomenon of social cocooning, critics also question the efficacy of online resistance in the face of the anywhere and nowhere of the internet that, following their argument, does not speak to the disparities of class, race or gender in a particular locale. However, sociologists of the internet such as



Clay Shirkey⁵ point to the trend of web-based software projects being tailored for very specific community needs and contexts. He calls this *situated software*.

Sceptics claim that media activists do not smell the sweat of real people at a demonstration anymore. But practices of resistance are increasingly hybrid, situated between embodied and disembodied experience. The pervasiveness of mobile communication devices intensifies. In Euro-American cultures activists still go from door to



door, and they demonstrate forcefully, as was seen at the worldwide anti-war protests on 15 February 2003. They use blogs, mailing lists, cell phones and online artworks to further their objectives, organise, and document their interventions.

There is hope: new solidarities are created across networks. Individuals with network access and free time cooperatively produce in the commons. They can and do *out-cooperate* entrepreneurial giants.

Increasingly, online drifters become media authors. Recent studies by the Pew Internet and American Life Project have shown that 73% of all Americans identify themselves as internet users, of which 51 million are involved in online content production.

As in Homer's *Odyssey*, Amazon.com's sirens sing seductive songs that call up deep desires. And similar to Odysseus in the ancient Greek epic, today's online drifters need to be tied to the mast in order not to succumb to the sirens, and to avoid the trap of American-style convenience. Nigel Thrift observes that capitalism is now in the business of



harnessing unruly creative energies for its own sake^f. The Googles and eBays lure people into their web of content production, and many online participants all too willingly donate themselves. Corporate pockets continue to fill not merely because netizens buy, buy, buy. The economy is based on user-clicks, their every move, their mere presence. Their attention becomes the asset of the imperial word-of-mouse economy. However, there are alternatives to soft coercion and free labour^f. Websites like de.lirio.us, del.not.us and sa.bros.us, for example, are free, open source clones of del.icio.us, that cannot be commercially exploited as easily.

A cautious attitude in this context means to resist the convenience of proprietary tools like iTunes and free hosting services like GoogleVideo or YouTube. Micro-politics start here: with Archive.org and Free/Libré, and Open Source software tools. Archive.org is a non-profit

initiative that aims to archive all of human knowledge, set up by Brewster Kahle in San Francisco. Contributing content in the form of videos, audio, or texts to this repository supports the larger project of the commons-based sharing economy, rather than reinforcing Google's market grip. Obvious examples of commons-based peer production are the free encyclopedia Wikipedia and the open source software repository Freshmeat.

The question remains of how to activate affect on a larger scale for political purposes.

Today's tech-fatigued should not be worried by the fact that they cannot bear the labour it takes to keep up with evolving technologies. Ignore the overwhelming data streams that are speeding through the wires like cockroaches. The emotional weathers of online communication bring out the worst in some people's character. Mailing list responses cannot be modelled on facial expressions; and emoticons are impotent crutches that do not fix this problem. Speedy flame wars cause much stress and lasting regrets. Spontaneity, risk and the visibility related to online collaboration are not for everyone. However, armed with the knowledge of the dangers of online sociality, all can become students of the art of online dialogue.

iTunes beats slip into this country's living rooms. Ipods choreograph the cadence of the day-to-day. News and blogs are syndicated onto screens and become the everyday soundtrack. They are setting the thought agenda. Shutting off, at least at times, is fruitful. Leaving the cell phone at home is tempting. The always-on condition leads to hours spent on the task of filtering, or aimless wandering through the cinematic experience of one website after another. Independent thought and deep reflection becomes rare in American remix culture. An 8-hour workday sounds radical today for those dispossessed of their time. Getting rest is a far-reaching proposal in a society that is all work and no play. Artists understood this early on. In 1978, the Slovenian artist Mladen Stilinovic created a photo series that shows him sleeping in his Ljubljana apartment. Title: *The Artist at Work*. Don't let labour drool over your leisure time!f Stilinovic seemed to say.

Time management, however, is again a political tool.

From Monday to Sunday, in-the-flesh conversations are cut off by the freeze frame initiated by the ringtone. Cell phones become extensions of the body, and obsessive attention to email inboxes re-routes lived experience to the virtual. A cry for attention is covered up as need for communication. Self-worth is defined by Google results for one's name, the total of blog subscribers, or the number of visitors to one's website. To disappoint such power-oriented, competitive self-assertion and the efficiency-enhancing aspects of sociable web media can be considered radical; and historically, it has been the job of artists to disabuse social expectations.

The Power of Nowf slogan that Vodaphone advocates could perhaps be best interpreted by going for a swim. T-Mobile's Upgrading Downtimef could be interpreted as an invitation to read a book. Downtime-Downloadf could be a call to recollect a meaningful encounter. Today, it is highly unconventional to have a concentrated, long-term life-vision that is unimpressed by the surrounding carrot-and-stick-society that sets its citizens up to arbitrarily drift from one opportunity to the next. Living a more engaged, critical cultural life means to have actual friends for whom one cares. This interaction is different from

socialising with business associates, mingling among professional favour networks, or hanging out with people who may advance one's career. It has nothing to do with the intense loneliness that one can feel among one's 9000 friends in a secluded, online-friends network like MySpace. Each online stroll aims to cultivate subjects as products, as users.

Everything about contemporary existence, every part of life, is exteriorised, is real-time, is blogged and documented, is paired with visibility. In this context, rebellion can be defined as the will to disappear, to unlink. This implies disregarding the defining spirit and mood of



the time and searching for one's own fascinations. What is at stake here is not a romantic notion of the subject, but the demand for originality, depth and reflection.

This essay argues for a passionate embrace of *sociable web media*, even while it urges the user to remain vigilant of their palpable, lingering dangers. On the one hand, there are the obvious problems of utopian network flurry in the face of today's clumsy technologies. On the other hand, online connectivity allows for networked affect. Anger, frustration, joy and other powerful emotions become visible. They manifest and are shared online. Their presence assures us that networked sharing and digital collaboration are neither a utopia nor a fad; they are compelling, inescapable contemporary realities that need to be reckoned with.

NOTES

1. The term *sociable web media* refers to media architectures such as mailing lists, weblogs, wikis, RSS, cell phone text messaging, social bookmarking, podcasting, and VoIP.
2. Nigel Thrift. *Intensities of Feeling: Towards A Spatial Politics of Affect*. In *Geographiska Annaler*, pp. 57-78 (2004).
3. McKenzie Wark. *A Hacker Manifesto* (Harvard University Press, 2004, Cambridge).
4. DARPA is part of the US Department of Defense, and responsible for the development of new technologies for use by the military. Funded projects included ARPANET, its computer-networking programme that eventually led to the development of the internet.
5. Clay Shirky. *Situated Software*. http://www.shirky.com/writings/situated_software.html
Last accessed 5 May 2006.

A Science of Liberalisation and the Markets It Produces

SIVA ARUMUGAM

A careful evaluation of the relationship between Marx's writings on fetishism and value in *Capital* and recent science studies approaches to the discipline of economics, will enable me to make the following argument: the relationship between the value of the labour embodied in a commodity and the market price of that commodity is commodity fetishism; and, further, financial derivatives pricing models are best understood as attempts to mathematise that relation. It would follow that a critique of the success of neoclassical economics, and the global economy it has made possible, ought to be sought in a critique of its supposed sub-discipline, financial economics.¹

An important part of the politics of globalisation is the continuing creation and liberalisation of derivatives markets in stocks, bonds and commodities. The rapid growth of and changes in the ideal worlds of such markets both create and stand in for turbulence in our shared world. But the notion of turbulence from fluid mechanics is understood there in an immanent manner ; explanations of turbulence in fluid flows do not depend upon some or other external impediment to that flow. If this metaphor from the physics of fluids is to be meaningful, effective opposition to economic liberalisation must be sought in an internal understanding of the neoclassical economics sustaining such policies. Further, as financial market theorists have recently moved beyond the assumptions underlying neoclassical economics, I argue that the social effects of market liberalisation cannot be effectively opposed without a nuanced understanding of the financial models such market participants create and employ.

The "Purchase" of Constructivism

In *The Social Construction of What?* Hacking (1999) asserts four theses about social construction work, listed together here:

- 0: In the present state of affairs, X is taken for granted; X appears to be inevitable (12).
- 1: X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable.
- 2: X is quite bad as it is.
- 3: We would be much better off if X were done away with, or at least radically transformed (6).

Hacking (19) suggests that this list comports with grades of (this time, un-enumerated) least-to-most demanding varieties of constructivism:²

- Historical
- Ironical
- Reformist; Unmasking
- Rebellious
- Revolutionary

It is easy to see the correspondence between these two lists. If only condition (0) obtains, one is most likely an historical constructivist, if (0) and (1) obtain together, one is likely an ironical constructivist and so on, in Hacking's schema.

The point behind these grades of constructivism comes out in his writing on the "science wars". Hacking assumes a disagreement between two parties: constructivists and scientists. He lists three "sticking points" between these adversaries. The first concerns the contingency of scientific theories. Hacking notes, for example, that Andrew Pickering, in *Constructing Quarks* (1984), "holds that the evolution of physics, including the quark idea, is thoroughly contingent and could have evolved in other ways" (1999: 31). Here Hacking inserts an empirical claim: "Most physicists, in contrast, think that the quark solution was inevitable. They are pretty sure that longstanding parts of physics were inevitable" (ibid.). The second sticking point concerns classification. Hacking argues that "constructionists tend to maintain that classifications are not determined by how the world is, but are convenient ways in which to represent it. They maintain that the world does not come quietly wrapped up in facts. Facts are the consequences of ways in which we represent the world" (ibid., 33). The third, and last, sticking point concerns the stability of scientific theories. Hacking suggests that "contrary to the themes of Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn, namely refutation and revolution, a great deal of modern science is stable^a Scientists think that the stability is the consequence of compelling evidence. Constructionists think that stability results from factors external to the overt content of the science" (ibid.).

Hacking's empirical claims aside, his account of the three sticking points between the two groups ; scientists and constructivists ; makes clear his own understanding of

constructivism. The first sticking point, contingency, and the third, stability, are closely related. His argument appears to be that constructivists are wedded to the claim that scientific theories could have been and could be otherwise. This puts them, according to the schemas listed above, in line with thesis 1, matched to an ironic constructivism. These are the minimalist claims of the constructivist side of the science wars. On the other hand, Hacking commits "scientists" to a very strong claim with regard to putative findings in science, and does so explicitly. He states, for example, that "Maxwell's Equations, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the velocity of light, and lowly substances such as dolomite are here to stay" (Hacking 1999: 33). The extravagance of this claim does not lie in Hacking asserting that some theories are sometimes held to be beyond dispute, but rather in his assertion that some theories will never be disputed. The second of the sticking points is where the real point of this grand claim lies. He argues with regard to practices of classification that they "do not exist only in the empty space of language but in institutions, practices, material interactions with things and other people" (ibid., 31). However, people ; in his example, 'individual women refugees' ; "can become aware of how they are classified and modify their behaviour accordingly". By contrast, quarks "do not form an interactive kind" for "quarks are not aware that they are quarks and are not altered simply by being classified as quarks". This, he holds, "forms a fundamental difference between the natural and the social sciences" (ibid., 32).³

This is in fact the "fundamental difference", not between Hacking's scientists and constructivists, but rather between Hacking's and Bruno Latour's accounts of constructivism itself. In *The Promises of Constructivism* (2003), Latour treats, as he does elsewhere (Latour 1993), science as a parliamentary process. He notes, regarding Hacking's four theses, that "although it is an important step forward to reveal the inherently political nature of the argument, Hacking's gradient is too asymmetric^a he says nothing of the politics of those who should be called 'naturalists', namely those who need this implied stage -1, which allows for X to be there as a permanent fixture of nature" (Latour 2003: 37). This gives a position to those who wish that particular theories be taken to be beyond (political) dispute. Latour offers, in replacement of Hacking's schema, a series of guarantees meant to placate all participants in the science wars. First, for any given X of Hacking's, "once there, and no matter how it came about, discussion about X should stop for good". Second, "in spite of the indisputability insured by the former, a revision process should be maintained, an appeal of some sort, to make sure that new claimants^a will be able to have their voices heard" (ibid., 38). Third, "the common world is to be composed progressively; it is not already there once and for all". Fourth, "humans and non-humans are engaged in a history that should render their separation impossible" (ibid., 39). And, fifth, "institutions assuring due process should be able to specify the quality of the 'good common world' they have to monitor" (ibid., 40). The last guarantee appears to form the core of Latour's argument about constructivism. He suggests that the dispute that matters is one over whether any given X is *well* constructed or not, rather than whether it *is* constructed or not.

Latour makes use of the metaphor of building construction, of architecture, to bring out this aspect of constructivist arguments. He notes that, the authorial claims of architecture notwithstanding, "architects' stories of their own achievements are full of little words to explain how they are 'led to' a solution, 'constrained' by other buildings, 'limited' by other interests, 'guided by the inner logic of material,' 'forced to obey' the necessity of place, 'influenced' by the choices of their colleagues, 'held up' by the state of the art, and so on" (Latour 2003: 31). Further, even this implied notion of constraint is misleading: "What is interesting in constructivism is exactly the opposite of what it first seems to imply: there is no maker, no master, no creator that could be said to dominate materials, or, at the very least, a new uncertainty is introduced as to what is to be built as well as to who is responsible for the emergence of the virtualities of the materials at hand" (ibid., 32). Whereas Hacking "does not want peace between constructionist and scientist" but rather "a better understanding of how they disagree, and why, perhaps, the twain shall never meet" (Hacking 1999: 31), Latour seeks here to elucidate a constructivism adequate to the peace. The notion of uncertainty is crucial to Latour's understanding of constructivist arguments. It is this which allows him to make central the question of how *well* constructed an object is.

In "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?" (2004), Latour gives examples of constructivist arguments put forward for politically conservative, not revolutionary, purposes. Constructivist arguments, in other words, that even fall out of Hacking's conceptual grid. He points to a *New York Times* quote of a Republican strategist talking about global warming arguments: "Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled...their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, you need to continue to make the *lack of scientific certainty* a primary issue" (Latour 2004: 226, emphasis in original).⁴ Latour notes that the problem would appear to be no longer "coming from an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact^a but from an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases" (ibid., 227, emphasis in original). Rather, constructivism, and with it its critique, ought be directed at how well constructed particular objects are. Latour notes, from Heidegger, the etymology of the word "thing": "We are now all aware that in all European languages, including Russian, there is a strong connection between the words for thing and a quasi-judiciary assembly" (ibid., 232-33). Thus, a "thing is, in one sense, an object out there and, in another sense, an *issue* very much *in* there, at any rate, a *gathering*" (ibid., 233, emphases in original). The combination of uncertainty and the relation between objects (things) and parliamentary process allows Latour to mount a successful argument against Hacking's postulation of a difference between nature and social, and natural and social sciences. Hacking's 'looping effects argument' ; that natural objects cannot know that they have been named and therefore possibly behave 'differently' ; depends on a prior disjunct between the natural and the social. It is this disjunct that a consideration of "things" makes impossible. Latour suggests that the Whiteheadian refusal to force a disjunct between the natural and the social "is an entirely different attitude than the critical one, not a fight into

the conditions of possibility of a given matter of fact, not the addition of something more human that the inhumane matters of fact would have missed, but, rather, a multifarious inquiry launched with the tools of anthropology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, sociology to detect *how many participants* are gathered in a *thing* to make it exist and to maintain its existence" (ibid., 245-46, emphases in original).

Latour's analysis of various natural scientists at work certainly seems congruent with this take on "things" and how they are constructed. However, Latour nowhere attempts to examine the operations of *social* scientists. Likewise, Hacking's assertion of a divide between natural and social science is not meaningfully grounded in an actual analysis of natural scientists at work. More tellingly, for Latour and Hacking alike, a proper appreciation of constructivism is to be found through some or other realist epistemology. Latour seeks to reformulate a realist stance such that natural and social scientists can both be seen to be struggling to put together *real* "things". Hacking, on the other hand, is content to posit that natural scientists are perforce realists, but that social scientists must and do cope with an altogether *nominal* subject matter. Latour's notion of the uncertainty of construction processes will prove useful in the remainder of this paper. However, neither Hacking nor Latour seem willing to countenance the possibility that their implicit approbation of epistemology (whether realist or not) as the proper *grounds* of constructivism may itself have a history. More precisely, it seems possible that commodity fetishism may itself require an epistemology. Making this claim requires a (perforce ontological) argument about how the problem of the separation of social and natural things came about.

Value and the Commodity Fetish

The vast exegetical literature on Karl Marx's first volume of *Capital* surprisingly contains little on the relation between the labour theory of value and commodity fetishism, especially with regard to the so-called "transformation problem". Marx famously begins the volume with a consideration of the commodity, noting that the "wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form" (Marx 1976: 125). Whatever the explanatory advantages of not proceeding first with an account of capital as such, Marx immediately moved to an analysis of value, money, and from that fetishism:

A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties^a The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will (Marx 1976: 163-64).

Marx is quick to note that the strangeness of a commodity does not lie in its use-value, but rather in "the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the *socio-natural* properties of these things" (Marx 1976: 164-65, emphasis added). This relation between the "social characteristics" of labour and the "socio-natural properties" of the products of labour is then further explicated by the appeal to fetishism: "to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands" (ibid., 165). The commodity fetish is crucial to Marx, not only because it provides the grounds for his labour theory of value, but also because a consideration of the fetishisation process *is* his critique of political economy: "So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange-value either in a pearl or a diamond. The economists who have discovered this chemical substance, and who lay special claims to critical acumen, nevertheless find that the use-value of material objects belongs to them independently of their material properties, while their value, on the other hand, forms a part of them as objects" (ibid., 177).

The fetishisation of commodities, and from that Marx's critique, depends upon a defining feature of capitalism, namely that workers are confronted by "all the means of production, all the material conditions of work together with all the means of subsistence, money and means of production" (Marx 1976: 1003). It is a consideration of this feature of the capitalist mode of production that allows Marx to connect together the labour theory of value, commodities, money and capital with fetishism:

Thus even in the first *process*, what stamps money or commodities as *capital* from the outset, even before they have been really transformed into *capital*, is neither their money nature nor their commodity nature, nor the material use-value of these commodities as means of production or subsistence, but the circumstance that this money and this commodity, these means of production and these means of subsistence confront *labour-power*, stripped of all material wealth, as autonomous powers, personified in their owners. The objective conditions essential to the realisation of labour are *alienated* from the worker and become manifest as *fetishes* endowed with a will and a soul of their own (Marx 1976: 1003, all emphases in original).

Marx argues, then, that the lack of ownership of the means of production makes possible a fetishism that divides the world into people and things by imbuing the latter with a will, or logic, of its own.

The "Transformation Problem"

The transformation problem concerns a hundred-year history of attempts, following Marx,

to quantify the relation between the value of a commodity and the price at which it is bought and sold in a market. Marx argues, of course, that the value of a commodity is the average socially necessary labour needed to produce it: "If the *labour-time* of the worker is to create value in proportion to its duration, it must be *socially necessary labour-time*. That is to say, the worker must perform the *normal social* quantity of useful labour in a given time" (Marx, 1976: 987, emphases in original). However, on at least one kind of reading, the specific quantification of the relation between value and price was a project left rather unfinished by Marx. Further, at various moments in Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx appears to assume that the labour-time embodied in a commodity, and its price, are in a directly proportional relationship. Duncan K. Foley (2000) has provided a recent useful historical sketch of labour theories of value, an overview of the transformation problem, attempts to "solve" it, and his own restatement of the problem. He argues forcefully that the "full implications of Marx's synthesis of the labour theory of value with the theory of money are far-reaching, and to this day only dimly and partially grasped", and that "the most important consequence is the firm establishment of an equivalence between money value measures such as the dollar, pound, yen, or mark, and social labour time" (Foley 2000: 7). This Foley terms the "monetary expression of labour time", or MELT.

Foley suggests that Marx was fully aware of the general difficulty on which the transformation problem is taken to rest, namely with regard to "economies with unequal organic compositions of capital, and hence where prices of production of particular commodities⁵ need not be proportional to the labour embedded in them⁵" (Foley 2000: 7). He goes on to argue that Marx was fully aware of this difficulty and that he intended to "reconcile the phenomenon of prices disproportionate to embodied labour coefficients with the labour theory of value by viewing prices as simply redistributing a mass of value created in production among different sectors and firms, thus establishing the conservation principle necessary to link real capitalist accounts quantitatively to measures of labour time" (ibid., 11-12). Various critics of Marx on this point assert both that Marx failed singularly to do this, but also more importantly that under reasonable interpretations of the problem, there can be no rigorous solution to the problem. That is, there can be, in general, no MELT that can transform quantifications of the socially necessary labour-time embodied in the inputs to an economy of constant capital, variable capital and surplus value to the prices of production of such inputs⁶ (ibid., 15-17).

Foley notes that some critics in response to this finding "attempt to retain a kind of shadowy underworld after-life for the labour theory of value by showing that the embodied labour accounting system reflects some aspects of capitalist reality, even though it distorts the picture quantitatively". While others "retain a commitment to the historical materialists' perspective, but find the logical case against the relevance of the labour theory of value unanswerable", a few "prefer to see what they take to be the logical inconsistency of Marx's labour theory of value as a fatal flaw in the historical materialist theory of exploitation as a whole" (Foley 2000: 18). Foley's argument, also suggested independently by Gerard Dumfenil, is that "the important issue for Marx was the idea that money represents social

labour time, and that one can therefore use a measure of the monetary expression of labour time appropriately defined at the level of the aggregate system of commodity production to translate flows of money in real-world capitalist accounts into flows of labour-time and vice versa" (ibid., 20). This amounts to a definition of MELT as the "ratio of the net domestic product at current prices to the living productive labour expended in an economy over a period of time".

The advantage of this approach is immediate: Foley's definition dissolves the transformation problem; and yet enables some of the key findings by Marx himself. For example, Kliman and McGlone's temporal single-system interpretation, in what is implicitly an extension of Foley's work, takes "the values of constant and variable capital [to] depend on the prices, not the values, of means of production and subsistence" (Kliman and McGlone 1999: 38). This enables them to find that "(a) all of Marx's aggregate value-price equalities hold; (b) values cannot be negative; (c) profit cannot be positive unless surplus-value is positive; (d) value production is no longer irrelevant to price and profit determination; (e) the profit rate is invariant to the distribution of profit; and (g) labour-saving technical change itself can cause the profit-rate to fall" (ibid., 55).

Those who adhere to the transformation problem as such, i.e., do not allow an interpretation of Marx such that the values of constant and variable capital be counted in prices, need to suggest that the "new interpretation" defines away a legitimate problem. Foley agrees that his interpretation "is a set of definitions rather than an empirical hypothesis" but disagrees "with [his critics'] claim that as a result the New Interpretation has no theoretical or scientific content" (Foley 2000: 28). Foley's account of "content", saturated with metaphors from physics, is worth quoting at length:

^athe labour theory of value under the New Interpretation plays a role in political economy analogous to the role played by Newton's laws in mechanics. The definition of the monetary expression of labour time is analogous to the stipulation in Newtonian mechanics that force is equal to mass multiplied by acceleration. Taken by itself, $f = ma$ is just a definitional relation between three theoretical terms (just as the monetary expression of labour time is just a definitional relation between the money magnitudes and living labour time), but in the context of a determinate mechanical system this definition decisively disciplines and directs scientific investigation in contentful and fruitful ways (Foley 2000: 28).

Just as Marx, especially in *Capital*, has rightly been criticised for a too-mechanical understanding of capitalism - this is held to be most evident in his writing on the relationship between humans and nature, occasional Hegelian warnings aside - so, also, Foley, has placed his New Interpretation squarely within physics theory.

Metaphor and Conservation Principles

Philip Mirowski, in *More Heat than Light* (1989), has argued that the metaphor of

mechanical energy in economic theory is integral to the development of the neoclassical school of economics in the late 19th century. The important feature that marks out neo-classical economics is, for Mirowski, the abandonment of substance theories of value, such as Marx's labour theory of value. Mirowski argues that the neoclassical school "displaced the weight of commensurability [of commodities] from external substances to the mind, but the mind portrayed as a field of force in an independently constituted commodity space" (Mirowski 1989: 196). This by itself would present no difficulty, but the mechanical theory borrowed by such economists as Stanley Jevons and Alfred Marshall failed to develop an appropriate conservation principle in economics that could play the same role as the conservation of energy in 19th-century mechanics. Mirowski argues that without such a conservation principle, measurement in economics becomes impossible: "In a simple extrapolation of the metaphor, physicists spent their time measuring energy, so economists should likewise measure utility. Nevertheless, this programme was doomed from the start because of the neglect of the meaning and requirements of a conservative vector field. Quite simply, energy was measurable *because* it conformed to certain conservation principles" (ibid., 235, emphasis in original). In Mirowski's argument, then, the contradiction at the heart of neoclassical economics, stemming from its appropriation of 19th-century mechanics, lies in the incoherence of attempts to measure an object that is itself not conserved.⁷

At the core of Mirowski's argument is the "metaphorical simplex" of body, value and motion: "In their historical manifestations, each was an inseparable part of the energy metaphor and of each other, with boundaries shading off imperceptibly one into another" (Mirowski 1989: 107). These three metaphors of anthropomorphic body, economic value and physical motion form a persistent metaphorical justification of ideas of energy that, Mirowski argues, goes back to Cartesian and Leibnizian natural philosophy (ibid., 9). With regard to the question of value in economics, Mirowski asks the following questions:

1. What is it that renders commodities commensurable in a market system, hence justifying their value?
2. What are the conservation principles that formalise the responses to (1), permitting quantitative and causal analysis^a?
3. How are the conservation principles in (2) united with the larger metaphorical simplex of body/motion/value^a which provides principles with their justification? (ibid., 141).

As for the early political economists, Mirowski suggests that "value was reified as a conserved *substance*, conserved in the activity of trade to provide structural stability to prices, and differentially specified in the process of production" (Mirowski 1989: 142). Marx is identified as the last of such political economists. Mirowski notes that Marx's "ultimate objective was to prove that social relations could not be understood as assuming 'the fantastic form of a relation between things'", and then asks, "but how could his own stable of physical metaphors avoid such a fate?" Further, and most importantly for Mirowski, given

that Marx lived through transition in physics from substance theories of energy to field theories of energy: "there ended up being not one but *two* Marxian theories of value: the first rooted in the older substance tradition, the other sporting resemblances to nascent field theories in physics" (ibid., 177, emphasis in original).

The first of the theories of value, Mirowski argues, is organised around the conservation of socially necessary labour time: "value is conserved in the entire economy with the single exception of the labour process, and³ there surplus labour 'substance' is generated", this being in turn "essentially the same analytic manoeuvre as the physiocratic postulate that value is only generated in agriculture" (Mirowski 1989: 180). Mirowski suggests that in the second Marxian theory of value, quantifications of value are entirely contingent. Although a commodity's "physical complexion or its past history might persist unaltered, its real-cost labour value would be subjected to [retroactive] change by technological alterations anywhere in the economy, or even by *market phenomena* such as market-clearing adjustments, including those that did not directly impinge upon the commodity in question" (ibid., 181, emphasis in original). The first theory of value is crucial to Marx because it enables an appreciation of the importance of history to an understanding of the functioning of capital: the conservation of labour time, and the creation of surplus value, is capital at work. The second, incompatible, theory is also required, because it enables Marx to demonstrate the manner in which the production of commodities determines how they are exchanged, and therefore allows him to write a history of capital itself.

Mirowski's evaluation of Marx here is a useful restatement of the transformation problem. Moreover, his account has the virtue of making clear the difficulty in trying to resolve these two theories:

Marx's procedure involved two externally imposed assumptions: that the sum of all goods aggregated at their prices [be] set equal to the sum of all goods evaluated at their labour values; and that the sum of all profits denominated in prices [be] set equal to the sum of all surplus value denominated in labour hours. These joint assumptions constituted a serious mathematical error because, in general, there is only one degree of freedom to impose such an assumption, not two (Mirowski 1989: 185).

The problem is not that the two assumptions cannot be taken together, but rather that doing so necessitates a commitment to the substance version of the theory of value, and that in turn requires the entirely unreasonable empirical claim of equalisation of "organic compositions of capital in all industries throughout all history". The alternative, the real-cost approach, gives an easy enforcement of "equalised rates of profit, on pain of giving up the invariance of the labour unit itself" (Mirowski 1989: 185). Here, losing an invariant labour unit disallows the notion of surplus generation in the production process, a surplus that is then merely passed around in exchange, but this is surely crucial to a critical understanding of capitalism as such.

Mirowski attempts to resolve these issues in two articles (1990; 1991), published shortly after *More Heat than Light*. The key move for Mirowski is the removal of physical metaphors from attempts to explain how commodities can be made commensurable with one another, and therefore exchangeable. Mirowski suggests here, as also in *More Heat than Light*, that the "structure of the classical substance and of the neoclassical field theories were both largely projections of mathematical models of the physical world dominant in those respective eras" (Mirowski 1991: 566). He further claims that "there has *never* been a serious exploration of the logical structure of a thoroughgoing social theory of value" (ibid., emphasis in original). Such a theory of value "would be explicitly 'social', and perhaps even 'post-modern', because it would refrain from grounding any aspect of value either in the 'natural' attributes of the commodities^a or in the supposed inherent psychological regularities of the individual mind" (ibid.). Mirowski noted that one of the difficulties of neoclassical economics is an inappropriate dependence on mathematical formalism. However, his own social theory of value requires a mathematical treatment "because it is a historical fact that modern market actors predicate their economic interactions upon prices and quantities expressed as rational numbers⁸" (ibid., 567).

Mirowski notes, as a first step toward a theory of value, that commodities "are rendered quantitative in the marketplace as part of the construction of standardised production and marketing, or, in other words, as part and parcel of the fabrication of value" (Mirowski 1991: 569). This always uncertain construction of the commensuration of commodities is a question of measurement theory. Second, "in a pure barter economy, any arbitrary trade has no significance for any subsequent trade, mainly because there is no stable natural identity or benchmark against which all trades may be compared" (ibid., 571). Money, as a universal equivalent, is the attempt at such a benchmark. Mirowski argues that "in a social theory of value, money *is* value; but precisely because it is socially constituted, its invariance is not guaranteed by any 'natural' ground, and must be continually maintained by further social institutions, such as the development of double-entry accounting and financial institutions such as banks" (ibid., 572, emphasis in original). Lastly, market exchanges of commodities have to form a price system such that it is arbitrage-free. This is an important condition, because it precludes the possibility of exchanging commodities from (say) wheat to cotton and back to wheat being persistently profitable. Without this condition, market exchange would merely consist of a "disparate motley of unconnected barter activities" (ibid., 574). What this last condition amounts to is a conservation of value in the exchange process itself. Mirowski carefully notes that this arbitrage-free state is never actually achieved, for "prices never 'approach' any fixed or deterministic point, and time series of prices will inevitably appear stochastic" (ibid., 578).

Value and the Mathematics of Derivatives Trading

The central feature of Mirowski's argument is, then, of the social, and therefore stochastic, conservation of value in commodity exchange. Unfortunately, Mirowski does not consider directly the one field of economics that combines conservation (rendered as the arbitrage-

free requirement) with an attention to the stochastic, or continually uncertain, nature of exchange. This is the field of financial economics. The central problematic of financial economics as it is practiced today is the attempt to find a model that gives the "correct" value of a financial commodity. Any discrepancies between the model-derived value and the actual market price of that commodity can then be taken advantage of.

A number of authors have pointed to the overwhelming importance of financial economics and, in particular, derivatives trading, in the global economy. In a recent synthesis, Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee (2004), note that financial economic theory institutionally has "little or no interest in or appreciation for the social and economic conditions that might engender and sustain the emergence of a global system". On the other hand, "social theorists who, though deeply concerned with the transformations occurring globally, especially in the developing and transitional economies, [have] very little familiarity with finance" (LiPuma and Lee 2004: x). They assert that capitalism is "transforming from a production-centred, nation-based political economy to much more cosmopolitan structure in which not only does production share the stage with circulation, but circulation appears to be subsuming production"^a (ibid., 161-62). Leaving aside the question of the unique nature of globalisation in the present,⁹ LiPuma and Lee's emphasis on a shift from a production-based economy to a circulation-based economy appears to depend on a misunderstanding of the role risk plays in financial economics. They argue, for example, that "in contrast to manufactured commodities, human labour and materials are inconsequential in the creation and valuation of derivatives" (ibid., 48).

This is, of course, an extraordinary proposition: the entire infrastructure involved in banking, the crucial role that computers play in derivatives markets, the regulated accounting schemes put in place by monetary authorities, and the labour directed at controlling the production of counterfeit money,¹⁰ are all examples of production-centred activities that are ignored by LiPuma and Lee. More importantly, their understanding of derivatives pricing seems to solely concern Fisher Black and Myron Scholes' 1973 paper on options valuation models. They assert, for example, that "the wealth of social, economic, and political relations that engender specific risks appears as a singular, homogeneous object"^a it now becomes impossible to price the socio-historical risk that a unique or revolutionary event will occur or to price the systemic risk to the circulatory system as a whole" (LiPuma and Lee 2004: 150). Although their account is sensitive to the rapid innovation of financial economics at work in such markets, and although they build into their account the useful notion that financial derivatives now drive the markets for commodities on which they are based, LiPuma and Lee base their understanding of the pricing of derivatives on what has become the outdated work of Black and Scholes (1973), itself based on (again, now outdated) physical theories of the motion of gas particles.

A short account of a simple derivative, and the assumptions behind the Black-Scholes' pricing model, may be helpful. Suppose that IBM stock currently trades at around a hundred US dollars (\$100). Two parties may decide to respectively buy and sell a contract such that the buyer pays some amount of money in order to gain the right, but not the obligation, to

purchase IBM stock at a price of \$105 in 3 months' time (this is known as a "call option"). Clearly, the buyer will only exercise that right if, in three months' time, the price of IBM stocks has risen above \$105. Contrawise, if IBM stock remains below \$105, the option contract will become worthless. Before the Black-Scholes model, there existed no rigorous method to quantify how much such a derivative was worth at the time the buyer and seller entered into the contract. Their model, then, enabled a rapid growth both in the size of derivatives markets, and in the deepening complexity of such contracts. However, their model rests on a series of untenable assumptions (that were taken by them to have negligible impact on the pricing *per se*) including: that "short selling"¹¹ is allowed; that there are no transaction costs or taxes; that trading activity is continuous over time; that a constant risk-free rate of interest is available; and that the price of the stock at some given point in the future be normal distributed¹² about a current stock price taken as a mean (Hull 1989: 219).¹³ Lastly, we have the enabling arbitrage-free assumption: as Black and Scholes put in the abstract to their paper, "if options are correctly priced in the market, it should not be possible to make sure profits by creating portfolios of long and short positions in options and their underlying stocks. Using this principle, a theoretical valuation formula for options is derived" (1973: 637).

Bill Maurer has argued strongly that most critics of financial markets treat "derivatives as technique, and technique as a closed black box" (Maurer 2002: 17). He considers, for example, Brian Rotman's (1987) argument that derivatives are signs that extract their value from their own futures: his "analysis^a depends on precisely the referentialist metaphysics he debunks", for he "effects a separation of the 'real' from the 'semiotic' that rests on his bracketing of the mathematics of derivatives, the technique, in order for him to make claims about derivatives' own indexicality, their pointing towards a semiotic shift in signs and meta-signs" (Maurer 2002: 18). Maurer notes, referencing Mirowski, that the "Black-Scholes formula^a is a product of^a the 'probabilistic counter-revolution' in neoclassical economic theory" and, further, that this revolution followed an early 20th-century turn to stochastic models in physics (*ibid.*, 23). However, for all his acknowledgment of the need to open up the "black box" of derivatives pricing, Maurer, as with LiPuma and Lee, seems to take the assumption of a normal distribution of prices as the only possible way of accounting derivatives prices: "[stochastic models] do not really help us deal with radical contingency ; the flow of temporality unwritten by divine hand, the accident of luck non-personified" ; for the "fetishisation of the bell curve and equilibrium supposedly renders predictable the unpredictable, but just as often¹⁴ fails" (*ibid.*, 29). There are, of course, no grounds for supposing that probabilistic models have to assume a normal distribution of prices, just as there are no grounds for supposing that because price equilibrium is never achievable, it follows that a notion of a tendency toward equilibrium is the "wrong tool for the job" (*ibid.*, 27).

Donald MacKenzie (2003) has suggested that the arbitrage-free requirement, i.e., the requirement that there be a tendency toward equilibria of prices of related financial commodities, plays an important role in the disciplinary divide between sociology and economics. MacKenzie notes that "arbitrage is trading that exploits price discrepancies: for

example, differences between the prices of the same asset at different geographical locations or between the prices of similar assets at the one location¹⁵ (MacKenzie 2003: 350). And then considers a situation in which two such assets' prices "temporarily diverge for reasons that are 'sociological' rather than 'economic': investors' irrational preferences, enthusiasms, or fears; legal constraints^a on market participants such as insurance companies; regulatory impositions (perhaps driven by political ideologies); and so on" (ibid., 350). In such a situation, arbitrageurs can profit from simultaneously buying one asset, selling the other, and then waiting until the prices converge in the relevant manner before carrying out the opposite trades. MacKenzie notes the implications of such activities: "to the extent that arbitrageurs can eliminate the price discrepancies that finance theory helps them to identify, they thereby render the theory performative: price patterns in the markets become as described by the theory" (ibid., 351). In his analysis of one particular "hedge fund" (Long Term Capital Management, or, LTCM) that sought out such price discrepancies using various pricing models, MacKenzie notes that their "statistical analysis of risk assumed the absence of catastrophic events in the financial markets" (ibid., 358-59).¹⁶

MacKenzie quickly adds that "LTCM's key members were well aware of the possibility of such events" and therefore investigated "the consequences of hypothetical events too extreme to be captured by statistical value-at-risk models, events such as a huge stock market crash, bond default by the Italian government, devaluation by China, or^a failure of the EMU¹⁷ (MacKenzie 2003: 359). The difficulties that LTCM got into ; the huge sizes of their trades, and subsequent losses, forming a systemic risk to all financial markets ; did not result directly from a underestimation of the volatility of the prices of the assets they traded, but rather, MacKenzie argues, occurred because "collectively, much of LTCM's portfolio of positions was also being held by others" and this in turn made it extremely difficult for LTCM traders to execute their (large size) trades. This "super-portfolio" effect resulting from an imitation of each other's arbitrage trades in an "arbitrage community" constituted, MacKenzie suggests, "a limit on the performativity of economics: under some circumstances, arbitrage may be unable to eliminate what economic theory regards as pricing discrepancies", for "financial markets are not an imperfectly insulated sphere of economic rationality, but a sphere in which the 'economic' and the 'social' interweave seamlessly" (ibid., 373).

A Probable Science of Capital?

MacKenzie appears to have too quickly turned from the "black-box" of derivatives pricing to an invocation of the interweaving of the economic and social.¹⁸ Don Chance has suggested forcefully that the central incongruity of the Black-Scholes pricing of options contracts concerns the assumption that changes in the underlying stock price (on which the options contract is based) are normally distributed. In the example outlined above, with IBM stock trading at \$100, the three-month call option with an exercise price of \$105 will clearly vary in price, depending on how volatile the stock price is itself perceived to be. That is to say, if the IBM stock price was typically taken to vary by as much as \$2 from day to day, the

call option would be worth much more than if the stock price was taken to vary just a few cents day to day. Black and Scholes' assumption of a normal distribution allows them to derive a "volatility" figure (expressed in percentage terms) that depicts how much the stock price is expected to vary in the future. Chance notes, then, that according to the Black-Scholes model, any one given stock can by definition only have one volatility figure that describes it.

Unfortunately, the volatility figure implied by the model does in fact vary from one options contract to another: "The relationship between the option exercise price and the implied volatility has been documented since at least the time of the [New York stock market] crash of 1987. When first observed, the implied volatilities were u-shaped, giving the appearance of a smile. Hence this relationship was named the volatility smile" (Chance 2004). That is to say, a graph of the volatilities implied by the Black-Scholes model against the exercise prices for particular options ought to be flat (because the options are by definition based on the movement of the same underlying stock price) but are instead u-shaped. That the "smile" was not present before the 1987 stock market crash, but was present afterwards, is strongly suggestive of the seamless interweaving of the social and economic that MacKenzie imputes. However, the empirical fact of this volatility smile has been taken to be grounds for a rethinking of Black and Scholes' pricing model. This means that MacKenzie's interweaving of the social and economic has already been folded back into attempts at financial economic accounts of derivatives prices.

Emanuel Derman, a particle physicist-turned derivatives analyst,¹⁹ notes that, following the 1987 crash, "over the next 15 years the volatility smile spread to most other options markets, but in each market it took its own idiosyncratic form". Derman argues that the rapid growth of options markets themselves ; in particular that some options markets are now larger than the markets on which they are based ; implies that the problems Black and Scholes faced are no longer pertinent. Whereas Black and Scholes attempted to derive the price of an options contract from the price movement of the underlying stock, a "better model of the smile should be capable of calibration to liquid stock, bond *and* options prices". But, Derman concludes, the problem is in fact much deeper: "All financial models are wrong, or at best hold only for a little while until people change their behaviour" (Derman 2003, emphasis in original).

Conclusion

Hacking's account of the political purchase of constructivist claims has made evident the fact that such a purchase is not intrinsic to constructivist arguments as such. His division of natural from social sciences, however, is not well founded. Latour's response, his pointing to the construction of "things" as themselves political processes, makes possible an entirely different line of enquiry. A reconsideration of Marx's notion of commodity fetishism is of some use. On the interpretation given here, his account of the production of commodities appears to conform exactly with Latour's account of the construction of things. Marx's labour theory of value, and the subsequent difficulty he had of accounting for

the relationship between the value of the labour embodied in commodities and the prices of those commodities at market, speaks to the possibility that this relationship is itself a fetishistic one. This is *not* to say that this relation does not have a logic, or rather, mathematics, of its own. However, Mirowski's critical work on the ongoing appropriations of physics models by economists makes clear that Foley's attempt at providing a physics-metaphor-based rendering of this relation is likely to fail. Maurer and MacKenzie, unlike LiPuma and Lee, have separately noted the importance of opening up the "black box" of financial pricing models and the stochasticism on which they rely. And Derman's account of the volatility smile makes clear that the interweaving of the social and the economic *is* what the mathematics of pricing models do. Effective opposition to financial liberalisation is impossible without a critique of such models.

NOTES

1. See David Graeber (2001) for a recent anthropological attempt to synthesise Marcel Mauss and Karl Marx on gifts and commodities, respectively. Emily Apter and William Pietz (1993) contains a collection of articles on the same range of subjects. If the argument that an understanding of financial economics is vital, not just with regard to globalisation, but also to anthropological theory as such, then much of this literature is not of direct relevance here.
2. Hacking speaks throughout of "constructionism", but I will keep to the term "constructivism" and "constructivist".
3. See also I. Hacking (2002). Inaugural lecture: Chair of Philosophy and History of Scientific Concepts at the College de France, 16 January 2001.
4. *The New York Times*, 15 March 2003, A16.
5. Consider, for example, a comparison of a plant-heavy industry such as oil production and a labour-intensive industry such as catering.
6. The mathematics of this observation is uncontested.
7. Utility is not itself generally taken to be conserved in exchange. For example, one person's 'enjoyment' of a commodity might well increase precisely because another person has come also to enjoy that commodity. The recent field of experimental economics is best understood as being motivated by the need to find a conservation of some or other psychological regularity in its stead.
8. Although Mirowski is evidently sensitive to the social form in which the commensuration of commodities takes place, he nowhere considers the process of conducting mathematics itself. Doing so would require a careful consideration of the rich literature on the philosophy of mathematics. One of the more pressing, because continually contested, problems concerns what actually might count as mathematical proof. See, for example, Michael Dummett (1977) for a history of the idea of "constructive proof" and David Epstein and Silvio Levy (1995) for a useful overview of recent work on the now related notion of computational proof in mathematics.
9. World-systems theories of the globalised nature of trade within the empires of the late 19th century, with the present as a return to that past, come to mind.
10. It is worth noting that the United States Security Service was founded to, and continues to be solely responsible for, this kind of "protection" of the US dollar.

11. That is, selling of stock not actually owned, in the hope of buying the stock back at a lower price in the future.
12. More precisely, because stock prices cannot fall below zero, the distribution is lognormal.
13. Hull (1989) is a basic textbook on financial economics that does not itself go much beyond the original Black-Scholes formulation.
14. "Just as often" is a remarkably infelicitous phrasing in this context.
15. In the example given above, the two assets would be the IBM stock itself, and the call option based on it.
16. That the fund, Long Term Capital Management (LTCM), employed Myron Scholes added to its ability to raise funds with which to trade.
17. European Monetary Union.
18. How could the economic and social not be "interweaved"?
19. Derman worked with Fischer Black at Goldman Sachs, and was recently the head of the firm-wide risk management unit at Morgan Stanley. He is now a Professor of Financial Engineering at Columbia University. The terminology of finance "engineering" of products is strongly suggestive of Latour's architectural metaphor.

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The Visibility of the Revolutionary Project and New Technologies

RAOUL VICTOR

How to explain the weaknesses and failures of the revolutionary movements of the 20th century? What must be deduced for the future?

It is in connection with these questions that, in a debate with Jacques Wajnsztein,¹ I had written:

I believe that one of the things which was lacking most in 1917-1923 as in 1968-1974 is the visibility of the revolutionary project, and that tomorrow, in particular thanks to the developments of globalisation, including the catastrophes and threats that it entails, and the current technological upheavals (the exponential development of information and communication technologies), the project of a post-capitalist society, without borders or commodity exchange, could be much more easily envisaged, more perceptible.

I had insisted on the importance of this visibility also in relation to the possible connection between proletarian economic demands and revolutionary struggles:

It is far too limited to want to understand the possibilities of a connection between economic struggle and revolutionary struggle without taking into account the visibility of the revolutionary project. It is difficult to radically oppose capitalist logic if one remains convinced that it is the only one possible.

Wajnsztein had sharply responded to the first text in these terms:

What you call the visibility of the revolutionary project is only the consciousness of the revolution of capital and what it allows. The horrors of World War One and the fierce exploitation and impoverishment of Germany did not lead to a clear vision of the world, but were nevertheless seen as favourable conditions according to the theory of the proletariat. As for the end of the Sixties, one can say that they were a real opening to other social relations and that it was rather the political dimension that was lacking. While today, how can you speak of the visibility of a project when the single thought and idea that we live in the least bad kind of society prevails? ^(a) There is thus no need to discuss what there will be to do, as that is imposed on its own. ^(a) One could believe the discourse of capital on the necessity and the ineluctability of everything that it makes happen ^(a) Individuals can remain on their own. Automatisation and planetary communication shape everything! But if that is the case, there will never be a revolution, only the completion of capital or catastrophe and the barbarism of social relations.

With different variants, Wajnsztein's point of view is unfortunately frequent among the old revolutionaries. From a justified denunciation of that which capitalism does and can do with new technologies, they end in a veritable technophobia, very much in the air in this period with its tendencies to despair, and, in a puerile way, attributing to machines the responsibility that belongs to the social system which governs them.²

I will try to answer some of these arguments, and show that capitalism does not have absolute control of all that new technologies are making possible; that new social practices, arising from the particular qualities of digital goods³ and from the development of the internet, occur on an openly non-commodity basis; that these practices are only going to develop further and that they will constitute with time (perhaps 10 or 20 years?) a powerful element in the deployment of the visibility of the revolutionary project.

But, in order to avoid misunderstandings, let us start by specifying what I understand by the visibility of the revolutionary project.

I have employed the term *project* in its most traditional sense, such as one can find it defined in the dictionary: the image of a situation, of a state that one thinks is attainable. To have a revolutionary project is to visualise and represent, with more or less precision, the new society, the post-capitalist world.

Henri Simon made a comment in relation to this during a discussion on the connection between economic struggles and revolutionary struggles: A project in the sense that Raoul understands is inevitably very vague, in the negative rather than in the positive sense, and, if it is precise, it immediately becomes obsolete following the development in technologies and methods of production which flow from it. In the same sense, Marx had already said in the 19th century that he did not want to make recipes for the cooks of the future; and Rosa Luxembourg, at the beginning of the 20th century, insisted on the idea that to define the new society we only have signposts, especially negative ones.

It is true that it is difficult, if not practically impossible, to envisage exactly what a post-capitalist society could be, inasmuch as, on the one hand, it will be the work of human beings who by definition will have changed and moved away from the alienating framework of capitalism; and where, on the other hand, the techniques and relations of production will be radically overturned. However, it is absurd to think that after a century-and-a-half of historical experience and technological development we do not have anything to add to the great and vague general principles formulated at the outset. Even if it is only in the negative sense, has the Russian experience and its failure taught us nothing? Don't we have anything to add to the ideas on communism formulated at the time of the horse-drawn trolley and telecommunications by semaphore?

I believe that, even while remaining on the very general level of the great principles and the general signposts, there is already a little more to put meat on the revolutionary project than there was a century ago.

This said, it is not by putting on paper precise new formulas on how a post-capitalist society should or could be, which is central to the development of the revolutionary potential. Even reduced to the most general formulations, what is important, and what was most lacking in the past, is the visibility of this project, the possibility of seeing in reality the actual conditions for its realisation.

In this sense, I can share the concern expressed by Christian⁴ when he responded to me on this subject: ^aRevolutionaries meet and work out their ideas for a communist project, a human community, based on what they know today. That comes down to the Leninist project: there are those who know and those who do not know. The revolutionaries bring with them the Tables of the Law^f. I believe that indeed, until now, the idea of a communist society, without commodity exchange, classes, borders or states, too often remained a dogmatic abstraction^f, to use the expression of Karl Nesik, an abstraction to which reality did not seem to want to give flesh and bones, if it was not in the grotesque form of a ruthless state capitalism. Rarely did social evolution make the communist project visible.

But here there arises a crucial question. The anti-capitalist revolution can only be the work of the immense majority of society, and it must be a conscious work. Such a consciousness cannot be the product of the preaching; however well formulated; of a minority of enlightened revolutionaries. It is historical practice, the evolution of material and social conditions, which alone can convince billions of individuals, including revolutionaries, that their discourse has a solid foundation. As the *Communist Manifesto* says: The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes^f.

Understood in this sense, the visibility of the revolutionary project during the 20th century remained basically limited. This is not in accordance in Wajnsztein's thinking.

The revolt against the horrors of World War One and its outcome certainly constituted the principal stimulant of the revolutionary wave that would mark the end of the first world

conflict. But by that very fact, the visibility of the revolutionary project found itself greatly limited. Generally, the first project aimed at by agitation directed against war ; one that is understandable ; is peace. And peace, in itself, could also be a capitalist peace. The German bourgeoisie had learned the lessons of the Russian revolution. As soon as the revolutionary movements against the war broke out, it immediately signed the Armistice. And, as soon as peace returned, the revolutionary movement lost the basis of its energy. The revolutionary attempts, which continued in Germany until 1923, were always the work of a small minority. Moreover, because revolutionary events occurred only in countries defeated during the war, the question of the future society inevitably tended to be posed in national and non-global terms.

As for the beacon of the October revolution, with the famines of war communism , with its new horrors of war , civil this time, with the pitiless dictatorship of a totalitarian bureaucracy, it served just as much as a foil against the very idea of revolution as it did as a model of state capitalism .

The revolutionary project was not that much clearer in the social movements at the end of the Sixties. The struggle against the Vietnam War would play an important role in rebuilding the progressive image of anti-imperialist , Stalinist regimes. In the younger generation, which played so important a part in the movements during those years, both in the universities and in the factories, Russian, Chinese, Cuban, and Yugoslav self-management models, etc., continued to weigh upon and distort the issue. Even if a part of the movement asserted its opposition to those models, as it had not for decades, it could not go much beyond the simple opposition of rejection. Capitalism still experienced its thirty glorious years of post-war boom, and in the demonstrations against unemployment one fought for the maintenance of full employment , because that still seemed realistic. The question of knowing what a post-capitalist society might look like was a pressing concern only for a very small minority.

Wajnsztein embellishes the reality of past experiences and expresses a low opinion of the consciousness of the present generation: Today how can you speak about the visibility of a project when a single thought and idea, that we live in the least bad of kind society, prevails? Even the opponents of globalisation passed from the anti form to the alter form. It is striking to see to what extent one reasons within the terms of capitalf.

First of all, I do not say that currently, now, there is already a clear, generalised visibility of the revolutionary project. I have not just landed from another planet. I situate myself within a perspective and speak about a process that can take years, even decades, but which is happening even now. In addition, and even before coming back to this point, I believe that it is not true that the prevailing thought today is that we live in the least bad kind of society . In the ambient pessimism, it is rather the idea that this society is heading for planetary social and ecological disaster that prevails. What is in general circulation now is the idea that children will live less well than their parents . The consciousness of the present generation is in certain ways clearer than those of 1917-23 or 1960-70, in particular on the questions which are fundamental from the point of view of a revolutionary perspective: namely the

global vision of society and the system which governs it, on the one hand, and the loss of illusions in capitalism, on the other hand. The thirty glorious years ended a long time ago, and have given way to massive and chronic unemployment, to insecurity and fear about the future. It is still the lack of visibility of the revolutionary project that constitutes the principal difficulty, but, as we shall see, it also constitutes what is changing.

However, I would first like to respond to Wajnsztein's somewhat specious argument: according to this, I claim that the revolution will be the automatic outcome of the technological development induced by capital. That will necessitate recalling the connection between development of the productive forces and the advent of a new society.

Wajnsztein writes: There is no questioning of capital. One simply awaits its crisis or its degeneration, but one remains in thrall to the sense of history. One would have to believe the discourse of capital about the necessity and ineluctability of all that happens ^(a) Individuals can sit on their hands, automatised and global communication will do it all.

Wajnsztein deforms what I say, or pretends not to understand it so as to dodge questions. I have never claimed that, from a revolutionary perspective, technological development under capitalism rendered the action of individuals or of classes useless. It is, on the contrary, starting from the problem of knowing what explains the weaknesses of the proletarian revolutionary struggle in the past, and what can make it possible to overcome those weaknesses tomorrow, that I grapple with the question of the present and future evolution of the productive forces.

If I speak about visibility, it is for individuals and for classes; of what else could it be a question? Machines?

What is it that Wajnsztein wants to say? That revolutionary individuals have to tackle the question of the possibility of revolution independently of the technological evolution of the productive forces? Would building communism with computers and global means of communication be the same as doing it with the material means available at the beginning of the 19th century; or, why not suggest, with those of antiquity, say at the time of the Spartacus revolt? Men make their own history, but they do not do it arbitrarily, under the conditions chosen by them, but rather in conditions directly given and inherited from the past, declared Marx. The armies of Spartacus defeated the Roman legions and saw the numbers and disposition of their troops swell, but they could have no realistic project for a society with neither classes nor exploitation. No more than any of the other slave revolts of that time, could that of Spartacus, which was the most important and most dangerous for the Empire, seek to set up a new social order. And the attempts that did take place only ended by reproducing slave relations. The peasant *jacqueries* of the Middle Ages against the feudal nobility ran up against the same limits.

It was necessary to await capitalism, and the explosion of the productive forces that it initiated, for the project of a society without exploitation to begin to take on a coherent, non-religious form, with its bases firmly anchored in reality.

Property, with its capacity to enable some human beings to dispose of others, their life, their work, cannot disappear without destroying that which renders it useful for the life of

society. Private property and its corollary, commodity exchange, are the most effective means of managing material scarcity. The project of a non-commodity society can rest only on the possibility of going beyond this state of scarcity. One cannot make a free product without making it abundant relative to needs. And that requires a degree of development of the productive forces that only begins to be reached with capitalism. Utopian socialism, anarchism, Marxism, all the socialist theories of the 19th century, were also products of the industrial revolution. The question of knowing what level of development of capitalism is necessary can be eventually be discussed, but the need for that development is obvious for whoever understands that the revolutionary project is not a simple religious incantation

Automation and global communication are realities developed under modern capitalism, and about them one thing is certain: their deployment and their impact on social life can only increase under capitalism, ever forced to increase the productivity of labour and the globalisation of its markets. That constitutes of the conditions directly given, not chosen by men, to make their history in the future.

Wajnsztein's question about what would happen if these realities were all there, as if individuals and classes could suddenly disappear, is of little interest, and is only an evasion. The real question, simple but crucial, is: for individuals and classes desirous of overcoming the capitalist horror, will the evolution of new technologies facilitate or block the possibility of revolution, and more particularly the visibility of the revolutionary project?

Will the development of new technologies make it possible to better perceive what the new society can be?

One can distinguish two dimensions within which to envisage the effects of the development of new technologies on the visibility of the revolutionary project, even if in reality the two are interconnected. The first relates to the increase in the productivity of labour; the second concerns the new kinds of social practice thereby made possible.

On the productivity of labour, I will only insist on recalling the fact that the condition for making products freely available, and therefore eliminating commodity exchange, depends on the possibility of abundance. Beyond the question of natural limitations and on the form of social organisation, it is dependent on the increase in the productivity of labour, or of productive activity, if one doesn't like the term labour.

The Nobel Prize winner Robert Solow declared in 1987: One sees computers everywhere, except in the statistics. At the time, indeed, productivity, such as it is measured by the ratio of production (measured in monetary terms) divided by employment (the number of people or hours worked), was not particularly marked by a more perceptible growth than in the past. Since the second half of the 1990s, things have changed: the effects of the introduction of computers everywhere can be seen in a spectacular way, including the problems thereby posed for employment levels in the Western economies. The importance of that growth is even more impressive when, instead of measuring it in monetary terms (the price of the goods produced), one evaluates it physically, in the use value produced by the same labour.

New technologies bring about a qualitative upheaval in the level of the growth of

productivity, and thus in the possibility of a world without scarcity, where everyone can receive according to his needs and give according to his abilities^f, in the words of the old but still valid formula. The visibility of a project of a society freed from the laws of capital, which prevent such an outcome, would thus be enhanced. It is easier to dream of a world where goods are free when the necessary effort to satisfy human needs is being reduced at an accelerated rate, and when that becomes visible.

But I would especially like to turn my focus onto the new social practices made possible by modern technologies. To fully understand the significance and the range today, I believe that there are two essential conditions. The first is situated at the qualitative level and consists in knowing how to recognise the authentically non-commodity, therefore non-capitalist, character of these practices. The second is situated at the quantitative level, and consists in seeing reality and the importance of its repercussions on social life within a temporal perspective of several years, or even decades.

Wajnsztein, and with him a number of revolutionary technophobes, see in the evolution of technologies only what capital does and can do with them, and conclude that that can lead only to the barbarisation of social relations^f. They can thus show how the development of the internet and all the applications of electronics lead to an expansion and intensification of commerce and the commercialisation of social life, of control and spying on the life of individuals, of improvement in the means of destruction and self-destruction, etc. But they see only that, ignoring, often with an ironic contempt, the whole universe that develops with it, and which is built on non-commodity ; therefore non-capitalist ; bases. They see in misery only misery^f, as Marx reproached the anarchist social thinker Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. They see the extension of commodity and capitalist relations to all aspects of social life but do not realise that simultaneously there also develops a sector that escapes that logic.

Capitalist trade through the internet represents a sector in full expansion, and the World Wide Web is becoming an essential instrument for any competitive enterprise. But, simultaneously, the internet constitutes as of now the greatest experiment in sharing , in the voluntary distribution of non-commodifiable goods, in the history of humanity. The combination of the prospects of communication via the internet and that of digital goods has generated, and is generating, an unprecedented development of sharing . This phenomenon has three dimensions:

- ; The sharing of digital goods
- ; The sharing of individual efforts for the development of a project, a common, public, work
- ; The sharing of means materials (computers)

The sharing of digital goods (software, pieces of music, images, plans, films, books, comic strips, electronic games; in short, all that can be digitised) constitutes the most obvious form of this new type of practice. That can go from the individual who puts on the web his best

vacation photographs; the history buff who publishes the results of his latest research; the hacker who makes available software that is normally subject to the payment of copyright fees, accompanied by a data-processing key allowing one to bypass commercial protection and safety walls, and to make use of it for free; groups of engineers who publish construction plans, etc. What is called P2P (peer-to-peer) has been developed, to make known what is available, and to enable its access, placing it at the disposal of others without having recourse to centralised forms. This system uses software that makes it possible to download directly onto a computer the digital goods taken from another computer. It is not a question of exchange in a strict sense of the term, because there is no systematic reciprocity. Each one can take from the heap what he/she wishes, independently of whether they also give something or not. It is a logic completely alien to commodity relations.

This practice is becoming a mass practice, in particular among young people. It is estimated, for example, that in 2004, reportedly 4.6 million people at every moment exchange music via unauthorised sites in France. It poses increasingly important problems for the film and music industries, as well as for data processing, and for the creators of proprietary software. The policies of the various governments against what they call piracy^f are fast developing. But they fear, rightly so, that too systematic a repression will do nothing but stimulate the development of a parallel world where, for example, musicians and other creators place their work free of charge on the internet. It is interesting to note that certain modern economists had announced the failure of the P2P at its outset because its operation does not comply with the elementary rules of economic rationality, founded on individual selfishness. They announced learnedly that everyone would be ready to take, but that nobody would be ready to give, to make the effort to put something at the disposal of the others. Some recognised thereafter their error and the need to reconsider the theory. At least, they recognise that here is something new. The old but effective argument against the very idea of a truly communist society; human selfishness; has been shaken, not just on ethical grounds but in practice. We will come back to this point.

The sharing of individual efforts for the development of a collective work is a dimension relatively less known than the sharing of music and films, but it is perhaps more significant and heralds what the life of a post-capitalist society might be. I have already written some texts on free software⁵. I tried to show how free software, which can take the shape of consumer or production goods, depends for its creation, as well as its distribution, on non-commodity principles. Even if today certain commercial firms, such as IBM or Sun, take part in this production, for reasons of quality and also in their war against the monopoly of Microsoft, the bulk of free software is the fruit of cooperation of thousands of voluntary and impassioned programmers through the internet. If one thinks of GNU/Linux (a system making possible the basic operation of a computer) as the best known and most widespread free software, it is estimated that it is the work of more than 3,000 programmers and a mass of more than 10,000 unknown contributors and testers, dispersed over 90 countries.

Another significant example of the sharing of will and efforts is the free encyclopaedia Wikipedia, continuously produced by volunteers on the internet and freely put at the disposal

of all. With it, there is no commodity relation either in its production or distribution. The control of the contents is ensured by the participants themselves with a minimum of centralisation or without any centralisation at all. Technically it functions entirely with free software. Started in 2001, it now already exists in 80 languages. The English version, which is naturally the most developed, contained over 450,000 articles at the beginning of 2005; the second in importance, the German version contains 195,000 articles, the Japanese 97,000, the French 78,000... the Chinese version, the 13th in rank, contained 19,000^a. At the end of 2004, it was estimated that more than 13 million pages of Wikipedia were consulted per day. How does such a collective work, which is neither policed nor governed, continue to exist, without being destroyed by acts of data-processing vandalism, which obviously exist and are always possible? It is the collective itself, the action of each participant, which ensures the work's protection and the compliance with certain implicit rules. It clearly has many more partisans and supporters than critics and detractors. And that has been enough, until now. The Wiki model is expanding into other spheres of activity. It constitutes a new form of cooperation and of collective production ; and it is non-commercial.

The sharing of hardware is the third dimension of the new practices made possible by new technologies. It is a matter, for the moment, of voluntarily sharing the power of personal computers. That especially concerns the work of scientific research requiring an astronomical number of calculations, and normally requiring the use of computers as powerful as they are expensive. The idea was to replace the latter by thousands of personal computers connected by the internet. These receive packages of data from a centre through the internet and return them, processed, to this centre the same way. The owners of personal computers can let make these calculations automatically with their computers while they are not using them, or in tandem while they make use of it without using all its computing power.

One of the first cases of this was the analysis of the gigantic mass of radio signals in space in the search for possible evidence of extra-terrestrial civilisations. In 1993 the American Congress decided to cut the appropriations budget allocated to NASA for this project. The scientists called upon volunteers on the internet. They today number several million. Since then, this voluntary form of cooperation has developed in many scientific fields. It is employed, in particular, for research on protein folds by Stanford University. This research, which also requires calculations on a gigantic scale, can be crucial for the treatment of diseases like Alzheimer's or cancer, in which it is thought that bad folds of proteins play a role.

These practices thrive and develop side by side with the commercial universe. Because of their new effectiveness, they become the prey of the voracity of commercial undertakings which see a means to thereby appropriate free work, a weapon in the wars in which they are engaged, and even an instrument to adorn their image. In certain cases, some of these practices also face the repression of the state, and new legal structures are being set up to try to keep them under control. But whatever the degree of interpenetration with the capitalist world, whatever the encounter with policing and control, these practices constitute a qualitatively new reality, one that is crucially different from commodity relations.

These new social practices are still, for the most part, just beginning; but the forms which they have taken until now are only the first in a domain which will not stop growing as it changes old activities and generates new ones. The possibilities opened up are infinite, and to the extent that the world of the internet grows, the creativity of new, possible, communities can only grow with it. It is estimated that there were nearly a billion internet users at the beginning of 2005 and 1.2 billion in 2006. That's a lot, if one takes into account what that number was only five years ago; it's only a little, if one considers the segment of humanity which still does not have access to the network of all networks. Besides, non-commodity practices are only one part of the reality of the internet, which, moreover, has become an indispensable means of trade and of the organisation of companies and governments. Nevertheless, these practices are a concrete demonstration that commercial exchange and the pecuniary search for profit are not the only motivations making it possible for humans to socially act and live together, contrary to what the dominant ideology repeats *ad nauseam*. And it is not unimportant, when it is a question of envisaging the possibility of a revolutionary project.

The influence of these practices in the social body, and within the exploited classes in particular, can only become significant with their development and extension, and that will take time. How much? It would be foolhardy to guess. If the growth in the number of internet users continued at the current rate, in 6 years that number could equal almost half of humanity. It would exceed 6 billion in 10 years. That is only one mechanical projection and ignores some important questions, such as knowing socially who will have access to the internet, or what part non-commodity practices, sharing, will play in this phenomenon. What we can be sure about is that their development is inescapable, for two essential reasons:

1. The inevitable productivity race, the veritable nerve centre of capitalist commercial war, leads to the increasingly intense and extended recourse to new digital technologies. Which means that the number of goods that can be digitised (thus freely reproduced), and the share of the digital in each good, can only increase.
2. Relations based on exemption from payment, free cooperation and the disdain of borders, constitute the most effective forms to manage new technologies of communication and data processing.

Here are the elements of the conditions directly given^f, in which one can foresee that humans will make their own history^f, to cite Marx once again. But the evolution and the taking advantage of these objective conditions depend on the consciousness of men. At present, what is the nature of the consciousness of those humans who now engage in those non-commodity practices made possible by the evolution of technology? Can these practices contribute to the generalisation of a revolutionary anti-capitalist consciousness?

Wajnsztein tackles the question, indirectly, when, so as to insist on the completely negative character of any technological dynamic (which he completely identifies with the dynamics of the capital), he writes: The need to make visible other possibilities surely exists

in various practical alternatives, and it is for that reason that we say alternative and revolution and not alternative or revolution. But it is not the dynamic of capital that produces this. It is resistance to that dynamic. Cf. without mythifying this form of action: the anti-GMO actions^f.

Independently of knowing if Wajnsztein, according to this logic, would propose anti-internet actions, it seems to me that he is unaware that the non-commodity practices related to new technologies often had their origin in opposition (more or less vague), if not to all of capitalism, at least to fundamental aspects of it; and in particular to the right of private property in digitised goods, the copyright. The internet itself is mainly the product of this state of mind. Admittedly, it is primarily a matter of digitised goods, but we know the increasingly central place of these goods in the production process; and, on another level, the importance of the question of property from the Marxist point of view. As declared by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*: In this sense, Communists can summarise their theory in this single formula: the abolition of private property^f.

This kind of contestation can go from the elementary form of action by the teenager who illegally downloads a piece of music because it is less expensive, without questioning his/her act, to theoretical developments as radical as *The dotCommunist Manifesto*^f of Columbia University professor of law Eben Moglen, who announces the downfall of property^f and the advent of a new social order^f.

The contradiction between the development of the productive forces and social relations becomes even more glaring when it confronts the reality of free reproducible goods with the laws of capitalist property. As opposed to what Wajnsztein affirms in his last book, namely that the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production is no longer operative^{f6}, I claim that this contradiction is more real than ever, and is engaged in the powerful task of undermining the foundations of the capitalist commodity ideology.

It would take several pages to take account of the debates and tendencies that traverse the hackers milieu, with regard to the potential of the new technologies. One of the principal cleavages occurs around the question of the attitude to take with respect to the commodity world; on one side, tendencies that seek to better integrate the new practices into the capitalist commodity world; and on the other, tendencies that seek to preserve the autonomy of these practices and assert themselves as alternatives to the practices of the dominant system. In part, the capacity of these practices to fertilise society's revolutionary potential will depend on the relative strength of these two tendencies.

Today, on the one hand, we see the struggles of wage workers who seem blocked in a dead-end cycle of powerlessness due to the lack of any alternative to the logic of capital. The non-visibility of a revolutionary project leads to divisions, and to the discouragement of a struggle for a ^abetter form of exploitation^f. On the other hand, the communal movement of hackers runs up against the limits of the non-digitisable world, whose goods are not freely reproducible. The interpenetration of these two dynamics is a means of overcoming their limitations, partly facilitated by the fact that the greatest number of hackers and protagonists of the new practices are proletarians, employees exploited by capital.

In any event, the future of the revolutionary project cannot be very seriously envisaged without an awareness of the reality of these new practices; or worse, to reject them out of hand as mere contributions to the barbarisation of social relations.

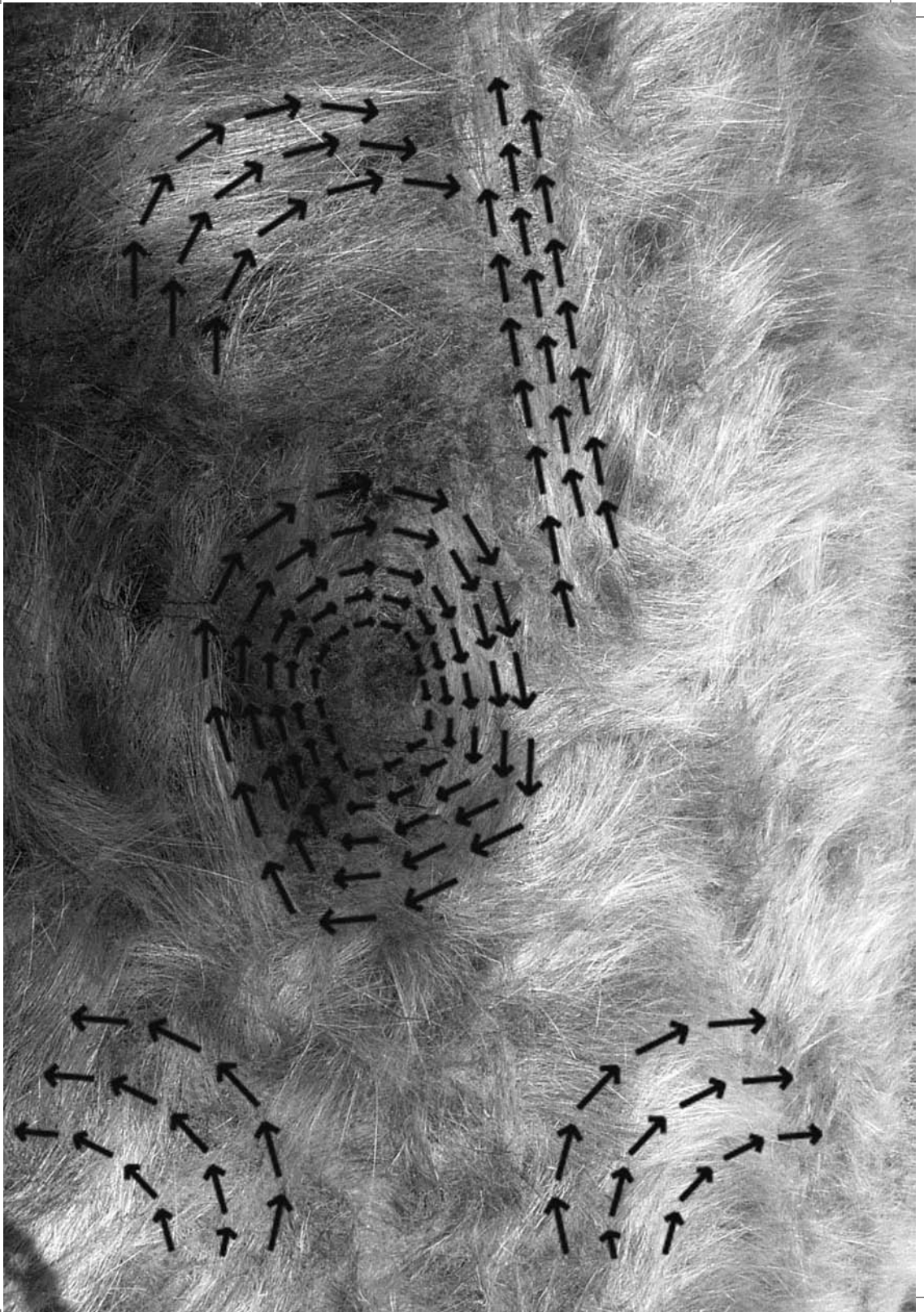
I am always astonished to see the indifference, if not the contempt, with which certain Marxists see these realities, these luminous proofs of two essential ideas of Marxism: namely, that the development of the productive forces tends to shape social relations; and that the development of the productivity of labour leads to the establishment of non-commodity relations.

Lastly, a word in connection with the argument advanced by Christian: If one awaits the effects of the technological revolution, I am afraid that meanwhile the world will become a dustbin. It is true that the ecological evolution of capitalist society is alarming, as has just been confirmed by the very official report, *Evaluation of Ecosystems for the Millennium*, submitted by a collection of 1,360 experts to the United Nations in March 2005. This report puts 40 years as the point of no return. But, if one wants to have at least a chance to accelerate a revolutionary process, it is necessary to start by giving up all technophobia, and making a committed attempt to discern the profound realities of the historical movement that is taking place under our very eyes.

The complete text of this essay can be accessed online at <http://dorax.club.fr/Visibility.htm>

NOTES

1. Jacques Wajnsztein is one of the animators of the group Temps critiques, itself a part of the milieu in France designated as *communisateurs*, which is characterised by a critique of the objectivism/economic determinism that they see as a hallmark of Marxism. The debates in question took place within the Francophone discussion network.
2. In *L'Évanescence de la Valeur*, (eds.) Jacques Guigou and Jacques Wajnsztein (L'Harmattan, 2004), Wajnsztein cites Marx on the Luddite movement, one of the first expressions of the workers' movement in England at the beginning of the 19th century, and which opposed the industrialisation of the textile mills: It took both time and experience before the workers learnt to distinguish between machinery and its employment by capital, and therefore to transfer their attacks from the material instruments of production to the form of society which utilises those instruments (Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 554-55; Penguin). Wajnsztein (p. 135) sees this as one of the passages in Marx most deserving of criticism.
3. These are goods in the form of a text, composed of digits, of numbers 1 and 0 that can be used electronically. This can take the form of software that controls an automated assembly line in a car plant or a simple image on a computer. They can take the form of producer or consumer goods. They are unique in that they can be endlessly produced at an insignificant cost, and transmitted, by cable or wave, with the speed of electric current. Once created, they cannot easily be kept scarce, subject to the usual bounds of scarcity. Digitisable goods are not necessarily digital. For example, a painting can be digitised, but in contrast to software, is not originally so.
4. A participant in the discussion circle that meets in Paris.
5. See *Free Software and Market Relations*, <http://www.oekonux.org/texts/marketrelations.html>.
6. (Eds.) Jacques Guigou and Jacques Wajnsztein, op. cit., p. 134.



Light from the Box

FRANCO LA CECLA, STEFANO SAVONA + PIERO ZANINI

I.

In a Hanoi hotel for the Tet festival, the Buddhist New Year's Eve party. Turn on the TV, and a series produced by the state broadcaster fills the screen. The subject is the war in Vietnam, first against the French and then the Americans ; depicted in a slow, romantic style - with lingering close-up shots of martyrs and heroines. Young people, under the age of 30, constitute 70% of the country's population; this series was devised to endow them with a historical memory that would otherwise be all but lost. But then, on the streets, in the cafes and in the soup and crab restaurants, people watch the umpteenth episode of a Korean hospital drama, dubbed in Vietnamese by a male voice that interprets all the parts.

In the hot afternoons and lively evenings of Hanoi, young people gain a little privacy by



taking refuge in the video-café and karaoke. The first provides young couples with an excuse to be together in discreet semi-darkness. The second gives them the opportunity to sing together the suspension of the country between old patriotic songs and the successes of rock music. Back in the hotel, before falling asleep, satellite TV offers the full range of competition in these parts. The Australians as Asia's self-styled Westerners, the Thais as the Buddhist laity, French news channels and, inevitably, CNN.

In one day you become aware of the ubiquity of television, but also of the enormous difference in the way it is used, compared to 'us' and with respect to television ten years ago. Today, the images from the black box, or better still, 'light from the box', as it is described in the Anglo-Saxon world, is everywhere. Not only worlds such as India and Central Asia, untouched up to recently, but also villages in the Amazonian forest and Papua/New Guinea, are reached by relay stations and satellites.

The figures are mind-boggling. During the 1990s, more than two billion people began to sit in the evening in front of their first television. Today, four-fifths of the world's population has TV, even if less than half have a telephone. In 1990, India and Indonesia respectively had 27 and 10 million TV sets. Ten years later, in India the figure has reached 80 million, and in Indonesia it is over 30 million. Within the last few years a substantial part of the world's population, even if it does not own a TV, has nevertheless the opportunity to watch it.

The most important transformation, however, is of a different nature.

If on the one hand television reaches the most remote corners of the globe, and is part of that unclear and highly ideological concept we identify as 'globalisation', on the other hand, its pervasiveness exacts a toll from the new environments it has reached. The context in which the black box is installed changes its content. While it is clearly becoming more



homogenous, it also has to confront the proliferation of local realities. There are innumerable local broadcasts transmitted via ether and satellite (in China alone, more than a thousand), and today broadcasting costs a few thousand dollars (a little more if via satellite) and is relatively easy. Fortune tellers, vendors, *marabouts*, healers, political parties, opinion and freedom movements have their own broadcasts. The effects of overlapping reflection and counter-reflection are shocking. Female Kurdish warriors in the Iraqi mountains, committed to the war of liberation, avidly watch Kurdish stations that have contributed to creating a local identity; but to relax, they also watch soap operas on Turkish TV. Uzbek farmers follow programmes in the national language, but channel-hop to watch news in Russian. Thanks to satellite TV, Chinese youth discover that there are other young Chinese in Hong Kong and in Taiwan, and that relationships between sexes there can be less regimented than in the motherland.

Until a few years ago the main debate about the pros and cons of such dissemination played on TV's rhetoric, the transmission of American values throughout the world, 'Westernisation', and the erosion of 'traditional' cultures. Today this has been revealed as a partial analysis. The periphery is launching a formidable attack on the empire, using the latter's own weapons. The most evident proof of this was the nervous reaction of the US, the country that 'invented' TV, when faced with the success in recent years of news-only Arab TV.

Television has undergone a revolution very similar to that of the internet. Borders, nation states, closed regimes and authorities have apparently remained unchanged; but television signals sent out from the most disparate areas of the world and received by rudimentary satellite dishes have upset the balance, questioned censorship, or widened areas of influence and of conflict.



Iranian state TV broadcasts in French for improbable foreigners, while an opposition station broadcasts programmes in English from Los Angeles. Syrian TV broadcasts pompous, monotonous programmes about the President's family, while the President's brother finances an Arab station from France, opposing the regime. And viewers in Damascus or Aleppo prefer to watch programmes from a nearby subordinate country - Lebanon, which produces secular, non-prejudiced entertainment.

The Al-Jazeera case is exemplary. A recent book on the history of the Qatar broadcaster reconstructs the theory behind its launch.¹ The Emir of Qatar's idea was simple. It was based on lessons learnt from the precedent of the airing of a public execution, which forced the Saudis, then financial backers of the station, to withdraw funds and close it down. The idea was to create an independent broadcaster which by statute had nothing to do with the business of the small emirate, and which was not linked to it for financing. Al-Jazeera still works with funds that are more similar to donations than sponsorship. The result is a broadcaster which has proved that Arabic is a language which can be used for communication with the entire Arab world, and which informs the rest of the world of the existence of alternative, 'native' version of events in the Middle East. Al-Jazeera would not exist without Islamic fundamentalism and its claims to universalism. Not because it is fundamentalist TV, but rather because it is further evidence of the Arab world's search for secular Islamic universalism. Al-Jazeera has created a new Arab *koine*, reinventing a new *umma*, a transnational Islamic community based on a linguistic model that overcomes the differences between local Arab dialects and classic Arabic, which only a minority are able to read and understand.



It was also avant-garde in its introduction and sustained focus on news and debate² instead of entertainment, allowing for more confrontation and controversy than CNN. The Palestinian question, the war in Iraq and problems in the Middle East have become the show, and its cast of characters are the people on the street, who flood the cafes of Tangier, Cairo or Doha, among the smoke from hookahs and the smog of intense traffic.

Al-Jazeera paved the way, and television became the new game to play in the Middle East. This new power, whether represented by the multi-millionaire Saudi prince Alwaleed bin Talaal, owner of LBC (Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation), or by the recently assassinated prime minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, owner of Future Television, soon understood that the new card to play in the Arab world is in television.³ At the end of August 2003, for example, one event sponsored by Future Television united millions of viewers throughout the region: *Superstar*, a competition between Arab singers that ran for 11 months, where the public was encouraged to vote using their mobile phones. The audience rating was very high, showing that even in countries with hard Islamic regimes, the viewing public wants secular and realistic entertainment.

The biggest change came about in the 1970s and 1980s, when local ether or satellite TVs committed to reaching specific audiences worldwide, including immigrant viewerships, began to build an identity ; be they Armenians, Kurds, war-displaced or religious diasporas, Otavalo natives or feminist liberation groups. Television shaped identities, unifying and consolidating nations and inexistent minorities who ; thanks to being mirrored on the screen ; began to 'exist'.

The material result of this transformation is the landscape of satellite dishes and antennas wherever there are diasporas, in shanty-towns and refugee camps, as is the case with the empire's outskirts ; from Albania for Italy to Belize for the US. In China, as in Cuba, Tunisia or



Vietnam, despite the prohibitions and controls, satellite dishes have become the symbol for a transnationalism that is a new identity. The greatest leap forward in this regard happened in China. In 1986, 95% of families living in cities had a TV; despite state prohibition, a fair number of these also had a satellite dish.⁴ Police states, censorship regimes, media rules and regulations; none of these can really, in the long term, confine access to information or outflank the individual/collective will committed to pursuing such freedom.

Attempts to censure this wave have for the most part been unsuccessful. The Iranian parliament voted in 1994 to ban satellite dishes, but the law proved ineffective; that same year, more than 300,000 dishes were installed in Tehran alone. Turkey attempted to obscure the signal broadcasting Kurdish TV, but this was only successful for two weeks.

The power of transnational TV is also based on the desire of those who experience marginality of different kinds to see past the prescribed limits, see what is offered by the world beyond.

Even if these hopes are dashed, even if Albanians are enticed by an Italian life-style that only exists on TV, even if the tragedy of immigration in the Mediterranean depends on the attraction the rich world exercises on that of the poor, it can not be disputed that television short-circuits spatial separations that were once also temporal. We can watch as live transmission what happens in other countries, and this eliminates the dimension of sequential *décalage*, the gap/lag in information, which can have radical democratic consequences because it stops local dictators from having a monopoly on the transmissible 'truth'.

This poses a fundamental quandary. The apparently homogenised expectations of an apparently globalised viewership are actually confronted with an enormous spectrum of local realities and particularised voices, as well as the continuous presence of a world



audience promised through the screen.

The reality is complex and always in flux, and it is difficult to sum it up in a single theory. Also because reception theories have failed. Today, no one has the courage anymore to draw parallels between what is transmitted and what is received. The idea that TV viewers are passive subjects is, according to the late critic Susan Sontag, part of the ideology of those who produce television, but it has little to do with the actual manner in which content is assimilated. Programme producers often have no idea why they succeed or fail. There is an enigmatic wall between those who are on one side of the cathode-ray tube and those on the other side of the screen.

The Indigenous people from New Guinea have a word to define television: the screen is called *banis*, which means a fence that allows you to get close to what you see, but blocks the passage from here to there. The concept explains clearly the aborigines' idea that the television is an eye that allows you to spy on other worlds and to be spied on, but there is a filter, a line beyond which what you do with the image is your own business.⁵

Palestinian anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, who worked for a long period in Cairo and also among Egyptian farmers, came to understand that television catalyses complex levels of reception. A rural Egyptian woman can follow a soap opera ; frequently inflected with the ideology of modernisation ; produced in Cairo, but filter it continuously through what she relates to on an emotional level and what, on the other hand, she is unable to identify with and judges as unfamiliar and useless: Cairo's affluent society.⁶ What is experienced through TV is understood in essence, but it does not change what already exists. Even if this fact is true, adds Abu-Lughod, it is also true that TV has generally transformed both the imaginative and social life of Egyptian farmers (with regard to their habits, their own



experiences and the evolution of their identity).

The myth of cultural homogenisation is just that, a myth; and Abu-Lughod's thorough analysis goes some way in explaining the phenomenon.

The social conditions of media reception are as important as the formal characteristics of the programmes. For this reason, a textual analysis of schedules or programmes alone cannot help to understand what significance the viewers give to what they see. Media scholar Ang len demonstrated, in a case study carried out in Holland, that those who watched the American series *Dallas* were not drawn to the capitalist values of consumerism and competitive individualism expressed in the programme. Rather, they responded to the dramatic structures of the characters' emotions, as if in solidarity with the implication that money and power cannot protect us against daily tragedy, and that even the very rich and very successful have their own problems.⁷

On the other hand, if you were in your Hanoi hotel in the afternoon, you could watch on state TV the re-runs of the Vietnamese public's favourite series of the nineties: *Even the Rich Cry*.

II.

Analysing television content and patterns of viewer receptiveness in the world today involves the use of instruments that up until recently were not even considered respectable or efficient. Contemporary focus on the contexts of reception give far better results than any other method. As confirmed by Indian media scholar Veena Das, "the only way to work in media today is to move away from the general towards the particular, and to see



how the relationships between events on the screen and in domestic life are played out in the context of specific societies"⁸.

TV watched alone or in company, in bars, at work or at home, on the street or inside, together with a crowd or with a group of friends, TV as décor and as a presence, in front of which we can be as attentive or as indifferent as we need or wish to be: these are the elements we most need to consider.

Reception is a social, geographical, historical, architectural, spatial phenomenon, and its nature varies on a scale of intensity that ranges from complete indifference on the part of those who experience the programme content as alien, to complete enthusiasm on the part of those who identify with what they are watching. Proxemics, the study of the cultural, behavioural and sociological aspects of spatial distances between individuals, reminds us that while analysing reception, along with the two components of context and attention we should take into account the distance/nearness of the screen, the fact of the TV being close by or far off, and its position in relationship to the other physical presences there.

The images in this essay are an initial attempt at this fundamental task of understanding the transformation of the viewer's world from his/her place in front of the TV. These images are used as extraordinary gauges of habits, emotions, behaviour, choices, physical posture, social norms and anthropologic tendencies. From one culture to another, people make different gestures and judgements that can be clearly understood from their faces and their body language; they accept the presence of TV as if it were an integral part of daily life, a crucial component that needs to be in agreement with all the rest.

TV does not produce daily life, nor is it produced by it. Though how it is filtered, the significance attached to it, may well in the final analysis have an effect on the production itself.



One image says it all: a Peshmerga warrior watches television on the Kurdish Iraqi mountains, with a remote control in one hand and a Kalashnikov leaning against the wall. The use of the remote control in the daily life of the Middle East has become analogous to saying the rosary. In the same manner that beads are passed through the fingers while praying, the passing of time is marked by the flick of a thumb on the remote control, channel-hopping between American, Arab, Kurdish and Turkish news.

Standing, sitting, lying, crowded together: each culture adapts the use of TV according to its own rules of presence and attention. Observing how television is used in cultures far from our own allows us to notice aspects of our own context which have escaped our attention, or which we have forgotten. Richard Wilk, an anthropologist specialising in media studies in post-colonial contexts such as Belize, observes that in studying the arrival of television in 'developing' countries, something we thought was lost is recovered: the opportunity to think about the nature of the medium itself, how TV has become a new type of cosmology, and how it creates new social forms.

The TV is on but no one is watching. It has become part of the family, one of its essential components. Why is it turned on? Because it is a status symbol? That is a dangerously moralistic and prejudiced explanation. Rather, TV is a presence, whose role cannot be denied. It allows the family to be aware of itself and the outside world. People turn on their TVs and watch (or leave them on but don't watch) because it allows them to spy, consciously or reflexively, on the world. What they see is perhaps deceptive, but it is what they, and everyone else, perceive as the world. TV is considered a means of keeping an eye on the world, of keeping it under surveillance. Viewers are accorded a specific function. They have to monitor what happens 'out there'. It is a gentle form of supervision,



similar to that of an inattentive security guard who occasionally glances at the CCTV screens that monitor a building's entrance.

In our daily routine, we watch TV while doing other things. While we sew, talk, speak and play. TV does not entertain us, we entertain it. We treat TV as if it were a habitual presence, a strange noisy companion with a role somewhere on the stage of our daily life. It provides background noise, the hum of the outside world that demands our attention every once in a while. People do not watch TV, they prefer to let it talk. It is the presence of the world in our world, a means of taming it while defining our domestic environment.

There is something obvious and reassuring about all of this. It signifies the passing of time, like the ambient murmur of a rosary recited aloud (familiar to Islam, Buddhism or Catholicism), the smoke of lit cigarettes, the rustle of newspaper pages being turned, the strewn fragments of gossip.

Ultimately, we find an animistic dimension when we compare ourselves with other cultures. What is this object that holds images, this 'light from the box'?

Regardless of how disillusioned we are with the medium, we are unable to find a suitable definition of what TV is. We find it hard to explain why it has become so entrenched in our daily lives, and why its reach is so pervasive and universal. As we learnt during fieldwork among farmers in southern Morocco, who had only acquired television in their homes in 2003, after being connected to an electricity supply: "You get used to it very quickly, it feels as though it has always been there".

TV takes root in a "visual consciousness" of which we understand very little. As explained by anthropologist Michael Taussig, heir to influential theorist/critic Walter Benjamin, it is a "visual subconscious in which magic has not been replaced by science; it



is a visceral domain in which the senses incorporate into a technological magic that we have gathered physically⁹.

As with cinema, TV has had such a profound effect on our lives because we were, in certain respects, expecting it; and moreover, had been desiring it. At the end of the 17th century, Persian Sufis would practice the ritual of gathering in a dark room to visualise paradise. Being able to dream in a state of wakefulness has always been a profound ambition common to many peoples. Oriental and Russian mystics built a theory of the imaginable upon it, an imaginary world that really exists. Iconostasis, the worshipping of icons in the Russian tradition, is part of this sensitivity.

Observing cultures different to our own poses questions about the history of the moving image that reawaken ancient issues. Media theorist Friedrich Kittler,¹⁰ art critic Hans Belting¹¹ and the late social thinker Ivan Illich¹² have all studied our visual cosmologies. Kittler claims that television and cinema rebel against the written word and answer the unconscious desire for the imagination to break out into a "quasi-reality". Cinema and TV derive enormous strength from the fact that they offer stimuli that closely resemble reality. These "technological" images are more difficult to convert into symbols because they invade us with the effect of a simultaneous presence. Belting reminds us how images were used prior to the advent of Renaissance painting; "effective" uses where vision leads to the transformation of the viewer because he or she is, in turn, observed by the image. Such is the case with sacred images used as a forum for interaction between subject and object. Contemplation affects and charges the image; it also transforms the viewer. Illich explains this reciprocal relation in terms of the difference between looking and seeing ("vision").



According to Illich, the latter term implies that the "gaze" is always trained on someone, and this someone may also be a sacred image.¹³

An Indian television series of the 1990s based on the tales of the *Ramayana*, an ancient saga involving Hindu deities, became extremely successful. This may partly be due to the politically-fuelled rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India, but also due to how the series was conceived, based on the tradition of visionary Hindu practices. The filmed images copy the deities as they are depicted in popular iconography; they avoid any semblance of reality, and break the rules of perspective.¹⁴ India has a long history of this. Traditional images that Indian farmers hang on the walls of their homes are sometimes printed on mirrors; this allows the viewer to see his or her image behind that of the gods. The genius who introduced cinema to the Indian subcontinent at the beginning of the 19th century, Dadasaheb Phalke, was an illustrator of holy images, as well as a magician and photographer. He produced the first film destined for the mass market, based on the exploits of the god Rama. He screened it at the West End Cinema in Bombay from 7 am until midnight, without interruption. When Rama appeared on the screen, the audience would kneel down in a sign of worship. Phalke was inspired by *darshan* (traditional visionary practice), based on the mutual action of looking at, while being observed by, the sacred image that one is worshipping.¹⁵

Until a few years ago, one could have a similar experience in the church of Saint Eustache in Paris. The American video artist Bill Viola installed a screen in the central nave of the church, upon which he projected his work *The Greeting* (1995), inspired by the Florentine painter Jacopo da Pontormo's *Visitation* (1529), which celebrates the meeting between the Madonna and her cousin Elisabeth after the announcement of the incarnation.



After entering the church, the faithful would kneel to pray to the image of Our Lady, which was slowed down until it appeared almost frozen. They would then kiss her robe or feet as they were about to leave.

TV gives us a special vantage point: it allows us to experience a quasi-reality, with the awareness that it is not reality but its reflection. We swing between consciousness and illusion. At times we are 'enthralled' by the reflection, at times we are well aware it is only a fiction. We are Perseus, kept aloft by Hermes' winged sandals and kept unseen by Hades' helmet of invisibility, staring at the lethal image of Medusa in Athena's breastplate of polished bronze, used by the attacking hero as mirror/shield.

III.

In these observations, TV as a mode comes closer to being a medium, a presence that broadcasts from the other side.

In Thailand, a country rich in mediums and shamans that readily fall into trance, something strange occurred in the northern region some years ago. A dark room allegedly began to talk. It emitted inarticulate sounds and fragments of words. Those who studied the phenomenon said it was an expression of the area's collective imagination responding to the enormous influence of state TV in the region, and to its attempts to impose a unified identity and stop animistic rites that are considered unorthodox by state-sponsored Buddhism.¹⁶ The room was a black box, reminiscent of television's form. It went into trance, as mediums do, and became the channel for words it was unaware of articulating and that it forgot as soon as it woke up. In the collective Thai consciousness, TV behaves the same



way, insofar as it cannot see what it shows. In this sense TV implies sight without seeing. We watch it, but it cannot see us. It is a blind vision.

Papuan aborigines, who reside in a remote village six hours away from the coast by canoe and four hours away by foot, describe in opposite terms the TVs they have seen in their occasional visits to the city. They believe television allows them to look at the world and to be looked at by it. They found proof of this in the fact that the Pope's arrival in New Guinea was watched on TV by the rest of the world. The anthropologist who comes to interview the aborigines is observed by them in much the same way. And, looking through this keyhole, the aborigines too can spy on the world outside. People that fly, devils, Christ, the Madonna, photographs commissioned by missionaries, taken from the air. Yet everything they see on TV exists somewhere in the world.¹⁷

Television reminds us we are all visionaries: this is why it takes hold of us. The practice of vision varies across cultures. This is why reception is an elusive and incomprehensible concept for those who believe TV is a formidable means of persuasion (producers included). It may influence people, but it is fraught with misunderstandings, distortions, snowball effects and contrary reactions.

In a classic article from the 1960s, Raymond Williams posed some crucial questions about television that are still unanswered today.¹⁸ One of his more controversial arguments concerned the passive role, real or presumed, adopted by TV audiences. Is TV an occult means of persuasion? Does it ruin local culture, does it destroy context in the name of values and content that are the product of marketing and publicity?

Doubtless, it is difficult to answer these questions, but the passivity theory does not hold its own. Scholars such as Daniel Miller and David Morley have proved that audiences



are anything but passive, and that the public constantly processes what it sees on the screen. Lila Abu-Lughod's research supports this argument, even if the Palestinian academic is reluctant to accept the existence of a reception theory that takes account of what happens beyond the screen, in the viewers' emotional and symbolic lives.¹⁹

However, it cannot be disputed that reception varies if the contextual conditions change. Solitude, the company of others, work, leisure, the distance from the TV set and different ways of using it, upset any attempt at generalisation. The passivity issue is still open for discussion, and it needs to be connected to the discovery of the different practices of vision that each culture possesses. Passivity in front of the TV takes the place of something else. It stems from the need to be subjected to an experience that engages us without demanding too much attention. It is similar to the weaving of a spell, a litany repeated, the contemplation of a slowly-changing landscape or the gentle idleness so dear to Mediterranean cultures. We seem to need this slightly dazed state every once in a while, this *débrayage*, this drifting of our soul, the feeling of being in neutral gear sensed when poised between sleep and wakefulness, or during a siesta.

The passivity imposed on us by television exempts us from being active or interactive, it expresses a desire to become saturated by external stimuli, it is a sort of drunkenness, a state of drowse, or intoxication by soft drugs.

This is why those who pass moral judgments against television are often found lying on sofas, lazily watching the screen and defending their right to criticise this form of cultural degradation. It is the same type of passivity required by cinema-going, when darkness makes all things indistinct and when we retreat into our own subjectivities and become nothing but eyes that take in the shadows and lights flickering on the screen.

Do we really want, in that moment, to be active? Or do we prefer to be 'enthralled'? As



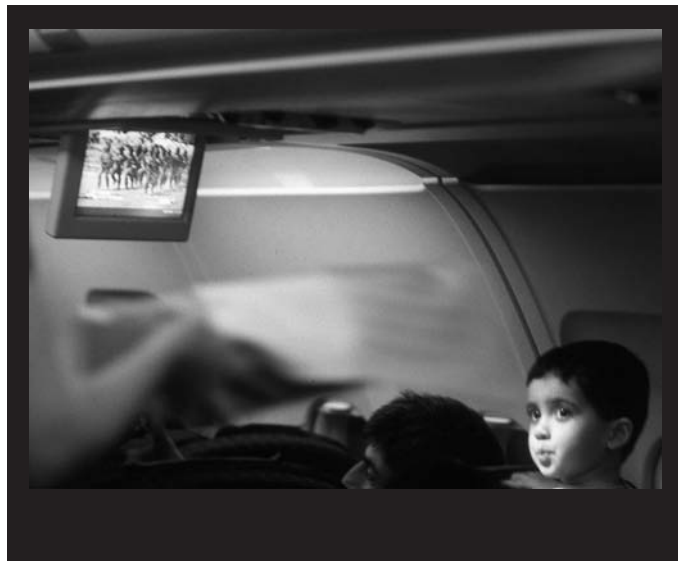
though we were reading a text so engrossing that we forget ourselves, our pain, our passions?

We become the object that the show acts upon. And where TV is concerned, it is continuity, not darkness, that makes this happen. The interminable succession of images has a hypnotic, bewitching effect. The fact that we accept this shows that lucidity is not the only key to our relationship with the world. This passivity holds the mystery of dependence, of wanting to be enchanted and held still. Therefore, television meets the needs of political and economic powers that prefer people not to change or become aware. The technological revolution we are currently witnessing is helping to weaken this power, to make it relative; even if, in certain respects, it also multiplies and fragments its effects in ways that would find favour with theorists of institutional/social power such as Michel Foucault.

But let us not forget that TV often takes over those who think they have tamed it. Even the owners of the machine do not really know how it works. Watching TV is a social activity. If we forget this, we will not grasp how it has become so widespread and how important it is in everyday life. However, its importance must not be exaggerated. Television is a social occasion like many others; visiting people, gossiping, consulting *marabouts* or mediums, attending neighbourhood parties, funerals, singing competitions and public performances.

Maybe this is why we have fallen into error. If TV is part of our daily décor, as though it were an ornament similar to a gently humming presence, its fragility, the possibility of being tamed, becomes evident with its pervasiveness. Anthropologists believe that people possess limitless cultural possibilities for dealing with the most deadly devices. Are they infected with endless optimism?

Or, more simply, has travelling the world taught people to put the pomposity of technology into perspective, as well as Western ideology which holds that the entire globe



will sooner or later become a 'Big Brother' regime, as George Orwell prophesied with haunting, satiric precision?

It is not necessary to forget that the images projected by TV are in essence illusory, and that their success lies in the fact of our "visual subconscious" intuiting this characteristic, regardless of whether or not we know that the root of "illusion" is the Latin *ludere*, to play. When people do not acknowledge this, they become influenced by it, as happens with every game. But, simultaneously, viewers manage to create their own game and play it at the expense of television.

NOTES

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15. Christopher Pinney. "The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, or What happens When Peasants 'Get Hold' of Images". Ibid.
16. Rosalyn C. Morris. "A Room with a Voice: Mediation and Mediumship in Thailand's Information Age". Ibid.
17. Ibid.
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The Neurobiopolitics of Global Consciousness

WARREN NEIDICH

Neuroscientists say that by peering inside your head they can tell whether you identify more strongly with J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter, say, than with J.R.R. Tolkien's Frodo. A beverage company can choose one new juice or soda over another based on which flavour trips the brain's reward circuitry. It's conceivable that movies and TV programmes will be vetted before their release by brain-imaging companies.¹

In their well known study *Empire* (2000), social theorists Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt elucidate what philosopher Michel Foucault had already made explicit in the last chapter of his *The Will To Knowledge* (1976): they once again reiterate and delineate, in Section 1:2 of their text, the different and evolutionary consequences of the disciplinary society and the society of control (to use Foucauldian parlance). On the one hand, the disciplinary society is constructed through a dissemination of social command by diffuse networks of machinic assemblages^f, to borrow a term from the cultural theorist Gilles Deleuze, that regulate each subject's customs, habits and productive practice.² Extensive culture (characterised by stable Euclidean geometries, the assembly line, arboreal classification systems such as the taxonomic classification systems of Carl Linnaeus) operates upon the subject from the outside, specifically restricting his or her movements and choices along pre-set paths. Disciplinary fixed individuals within institutions but did not succeed in consuming them completely in the rhythm of productive practices and productive socialisation: it did not reach the point of permeating entirely the consciousness and bodies of individuals^{f3}. On the other hand, the society of control operates within the domain of intensive cultural apparati characterised by the Riemannian

spaces, rhizomatic logics and folded temporality induced by the multiplicity of flows that characterise our global world post-internet.⁴

According to Negri and Hardt, this transition from a disciplinary society to the society of control involves the emergence of what they refer to as *biopower*^f, which regulates social life from within. By contrast, when power becomes entirely biopolitical, the whole social body is comprised by power's machinery and developed in its virtuality. This relationship is open, qualitative, and affective. Society, subsumed within a power that reaches down to the ganglia of the social structure and its processes of development, reacts like a single body. Power is thus expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population ; and at the same time across the entirety of social relations^{f5}.

Since 1987, the field of neuroscience has seen the emergence of Neural Darwinism and Neural Constructivism , powerful new theoretic tools that have profound implications for how biopolitical systems might instantiate themselves in the neurobiological substrate of the individuals that comprise the social body. Utilising these concepts, I would like to explore the possible mechanism and sites through which we might understand the new potential for biopower, which I am now referring to as the neurobiopolitical: the ability to sculpt the physical matter of the brain, and its abstract counterpart, the mind. I will also show how this process ultimately has very significant implications for imagination and creativity.⁶

Neural Selectionism / Neural Constructivism

Recent research in neuroscience, most notably the pioneering work of neuroscientist Jean Pierre Changeux at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, and the later assemblage and expansion of this work by biologist and Nobel laureate Gerald Edelman in San Diego into what is now referred to as Neural Darwinism or Neural Selectionism , has provided new tools with which to understand the important role played by culture in the configuration of the architecture of the central nervous system. This theory, or as it is sometimes called, the Theory of Neuronal Group Selection , has three main tenets: developmental selection , experiential selection and reentry .

Developmental selection describes the ontogeny of the embryo as an interaction between its genotype and the circumstances of its prenatal environment. Events occurring at the microscopic level, such as cell division, migration, differentiation and plastic modification, create what Edelman refers to as the *primary repertoire* . This term describes a dense and variable population of neurons with complex branching patterns that create extensive neural connections.⁷

Experiential selection is defined as the period just prior to birth and continuing throughout life, in which the diverse and variable population of the primary repertoire is pruned and sculpted by the environmental context to which the human being needs to adapt. Most changes, however, take place in the early years and are linked to what is referred to as *neural plasticity* ; the ability of neurons and their synapses and dendrites to adapt and change as a result of experience. Most importantly, according to Edelman,

Experiential selection does not, like natural selection in evolution, occur as a result of differential reproduction, but rather as a result of differential amplification of certain synaptic populations^{f8}. Further, those neurons, neural networks or assemblages of neurons, and their dendritic and synaptic components that are most often and intensely stimulated, will acquire more efficient means of information transmission, thus enabling them to outmanoeuvre those neurons and neural networks that don't. In other words, as a result of being repeatedly excited by recurrent and repetitive external stimuli, these neurons develop firing patterns that have increased efficiency and specific tuning, and as a result are therefore likely to be favoured over other neurons and networks in future encounters with this stimulus.⁹

However, neurons and neuronal networks do not fire in isolation; they are part of large complexes that are together called out by complex stimuli. They could be part of abstract assemblages of stimulation, such as a billboard one might find in Times Square in New York or Piccadilly Circus in London, with its flashing lights, smoke rings, video screen, text messages and speaking voice telling you to smoke Camel cigarettes. As eminent cognitive psychobiologist D.O. Hebb has so astutely stated, 'Neurons that fire together wire together'. They form greater firing efficiencies collectively, and form other alliances with other networks similarly excited and predisposed.

Reentry, the third part of the neural selectionist triad, allows for the synchronisation of neural events occurring in circumscribed and widely disparate areas of the brain. It plays a role in binding together these networks, some of which are broadly distributed throughout the brain, through its dynamic influences. As a result of this cooperation, even a partial trace of the original stimulus, by exciting a small number of neurons in a section of the complex web of neurons, can excite all the neurons in the network. Sharing of inputs in this manner allows for the repetitive stimulation of the network, which results in greater efficiencies for all the individuals in the whole group. It also gives the network advantages, in the competition for neural space, over other neural groups not thus stimulated.

Those neurons and neuronal groups that are less stimulated either find other targets to connect with, or undergo a mode of cell death called apoptosis: the process by which neurons that fail to find their targets degenerate and then are phagocytised (eaten up or absorbed by other neurons). In simple nervous systems, apoptosis plays a major role in pruning; the least-used synaptic connections being selectively destroyed, while the most-used are retained. However, in more complex systems like the cerebral cortex of humans, it plays a minor role. ¹⁰It appears that apoptosis is a more important factor in simple systems such as the spinal cord motor neurons, where about fifty percent of the neuronal population is wiped out^a than in more complex systems like the primate cerebral cortex where it occurs in less than twenty percent^{f10}. In these systems, the abundance of potential sites for alternative connectivity in the cerebral cortex may alleviate the need for cell death.

So far, this is a story of pruning and subtraction. It only partly describes the data on brain development and evolution, which shows that the brain mass gets larger instead of smaller with age, and that different parts of the brain grow at different rates. Neural

Constructivism sees development as a progression in representational complexity. It appears to involve both selective elimination as well as considerable growth and elaboration.¹¹ Studies by Greenough and Chang¹² and Coleman et al¹³ have found that the degree of correlation between the firing of groups of dendrites in the receiving part of a neuron, rather than simply the presence of activity, was essential for the production of dendritic complexity and growth. What this means is that the secondary repertoire ; the primary repertoire pruned by experience ; goes through a dynamic change in which those selected neurons undergo a further transformation. They continue to be stimulated by correlated activity, which may also correspond to correlated relationships in the real-imaginary-virtual interface, with other neurons which are coding for similar stimulation complexes; and the connectivities thereby multiply and grow (here I am using the word virtual to refer to virtual reality, not the virtual as described by Deleuze in relation to the actual, in his account of ontological parameters).

Neuralbiodiversity and Cultural Determinism

Culture is in a constant state of transformation as it responds to a changing milieu, determined by the cumulative effect of a multitude of immaterial relations that are each in a state of unrest. Each of these relations mutates within a rapidly evolving context of new possibilities ; for example, in relation to the speed of information transmission ; and develops new vocabularies and systems of meaning to accommodate those changes. Then, individually or together with the other changing relations also affected by these mutating conditions, they create new dynamic patterns of flows that impact culture. Sociological conditions, political intrigues and scandals, global economic depressions, conditions of psychological instability, historical reinvention, spiritual revivals ; all of these operate together to transform the context in which culture operates; and, in some cases, operate together upon culture itself. This flux creates new pressures on the system of culture, producing subsequent instabilities.

These instabilities are the result of noise produced by certain incompatibilities of coded information between the existing cultural system and the new flows of information it attempts to incorporate. To respond to this crisis of assimilation, culture creates new technologies. Here I would like to describe in detail one such technology, the optical; I confine myself to this in the interest of time and clarity, although similar changes are taking place in the auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile sensorial realms as well.

Optical technologies can be divided into two groups. First, projective creative optical technologies, examples of which are the camera obscura, camera lucida, photographic camera, stereo camera, cinema, virtual reality and, most recently, intelligent media. These devices help create the world as a projective interface to be inspected by the organic system of the eye and brain; as such, this eye-brain link produces the plastic mimetic configuration of the noumenal/phenomenal world. As is explained further in the essay, the eye-brain apparatus is a plastic and selected entity in a constant flux between being and becoming, a *being* and *becoming* that is co-evolving with the mutating conditions of the

world. It is the relation between what I term intensive technologies (discussed later in this essay), and the cultures they attempt to redefine spatially and temporally: redefinitions that lead to new forms of linkages in the tectonic substrate of culture itself. I call these linkages cultural bindings ; and it is this binding of cultural artefacts, for instance, that leads to new networks of meaning within that culture. This cultural binding leads to intensely stimulating cultural networks that, as we will see, may sculpt neural networks preferentially (I use the word *intense* here to mean a very strong stimulus, as well as one which is non-linear, folded and rhizomatic in its spatial-temporal dimension. This latter quality is what makes such stimuli powerful agents of neural excitation). It is this fundamental relation between cultural and neural networks that defines what I am calling Cultural Determinism.

The evolution of projective optical technologies has for decades inspired artists, designers and architects, who were awed by the new kinds of images and processes that these machines made possible. In her description of *La Fenêtre en Longueur*, a drawing Le Corbusier made at his parents' house on Lake Geneva, architectural historian and critic Beatriz Colomina states that the window glass is superimposed on a rhythmic grid that suggests a series of photographs placed next to each other in a row, or perhaps a series of stills from a movie¹⁴. This is an instance of photography and cinematography influencing the way the architect, in his desire to respond to these new optical possibilities afforded by cinematic time and space, reinvents the materials of his trade, glass and window, in a way that re-enacts and re-maps the experience of cinema onto the experience of architecture. We will see shortly the implications of this effect on other forms of visual culture, and their summated affect upon the nature of embodiment.

Invented in parallel with these projective technologies are introspective technologies. The word *introspective* can have psychological meanings related to the investigation of the self, as in looking into oneself or knowing oneself; but in the context of this essay, I am referring to instruments that probe the body in order to understand its own changing anatomical and physiological conditions. Introspective technologies may in the future help us to see at the functional, dynamic, synaptic and neuronal-net level, on which the effect and residue of events in real/imaginary-virtual space over time can be appreciated. This kind of brain mapping is beyond our reach today. However, recent theories that attempt to make sense of the ways the brain works have begun to leave strict hierarchical descriptions in favour of ones that are non-hierarchical.¹⁵ For instance, neural complexity in relation to subjectivity is now being studied at the level of collectives of neural circuits that display patterns of emergence of large-scale integration.¹⁶

Of the many new devices invented that enable culture to visualise itself, only a few are really relevant; and these, as a result of their widespread use and dissemination, help define and optically describe that culture. Perspective was the best visual analogy with which to describe the sociological, psychological, economic, historical and spiritual conditions of the Renaissance; new media is the best way to depict those same conditions today.¹⁷ This is not to say that one excludes the other. In fact, the genealogy of optical instrumentation is a history of one technique subsuming the qualities of its predecessors, followed by a

moment of unease in which structural rearrangement leads to a mutation in its form and operation, and then to the invention of a new device that can be adapted more adequately to the conditions at hand. We are reminded of communications theorist Marshall McLuhan's idea of remediation^f, in which the content of any medium is always another medium.¹⁸

I suggest here that an analogical process of remediation is occurring in the brain as well. The co-evolutionary phenomenon I have been alluding to is more than simply a selection of neural tissues: it is an evolution of the processes through and by which they operate. Phylogenetic changes are slow changes, the result of genetic mutations:

All the old control systems must remain in place, and the new ones with additional capacities are added on and integrated in such a way as to enhance survival. In biological evolution, genetic mutations produce new cortical areas that are like new control systems in the power plant; while the old areas continue to perform their basic functions necessary for the survival of the animal, just as the older control systems continue to sustain some of the basic functions of the power plant.¹⁹

Older systems of the brain form the basic foundations for the new capacities of the organ as it evolves.²⁰ This has been discussed earlier in the essay with regard to the primary repertoire, which is the end result of millions of years of evolution. Its variability is to a certain extent determined by all the changes recorded in the genotype, and slowly refined by natural selection.²¹ I refer to this variability as *neuralbiodiversity*. This condition, hospitable to and augmented by the mechanisms of neural plasticity, enables the rapid changes of experiential selection to take place, as well as those of epigenesis; the development of an individual and/or the external environment as a result of interaction between an individual's genes, external environment and internal environment.

These rapid generational changes in context of genetic drift and Baldwinian evolution (which is based on the fact of phenotypic plasticity, the ability of an organism to adapt to its environment during its lifetime, and which emphasises the fact that the sustained behaviour of a species or group can shape the evolution of that species) can become incorporated into the genome. The anthropologist Terrence Deacon delineates this as the mechanism by which we acquired language, and for which a special area of the brain was developed.²² Deacon explores the means by which language evolved as a cultural entity. He sampled a population of humans with a variable innate capacity for the acquisition of language. As language produced real advantages, those whose brains were more receptive to the acquisition process in the end gained a selective sexual advantage, and through their descendants produced a population of what he now calls *homo symbolicus*. Similarly perhaps, new technology; through creating new types of images, sounds, feelings and hapticities with intensive spatial and temporal logics; has produced different forms of cultural networks and binding. In the end, using a similar logic to that of Deacon, new forms of humanity could be produced. The new habits we now see in the children of the E-generation, who appear to have multiple or split attentions, is one example of such affect.

In other words, each new generation has a living brain that has been wired and configured by its own existence within the mutating cultural landscapes in which it lives. These new conditions allow for new kinds of images, new thoughts, new ideas that are transmitted and embedded in cultural forms of representation. As such, the history of this transformed representation forms a kind of cultural memory or cultural heredity, which has its own rules and regulatory patterns of evolution, that are different but symbiotic with Darwinian evolutionary paradigms of selection, subtraction and deletion. It is a system of memory that evolves as the result of the Bergsonian mode of creative evolution, which is neither mechanical nor teleological, and does not represent evolution as conditioned by existing forces or by future aims; it is additive, and concerns the ways and means that the constantly transformed context provides a backdrop for the constant re-evaluation and reformulation of cultural ideas. These ideas are alive, but pulsate at different amplitudes and frequencies in the web of cultural meanings, depending on the ratiomatic and proportional distribution of immaterial relations that create that context.²³

By ratiomatic, I imply that cultural meanings are virtual and in flux. I am here referring to virtual in the Deleuzian sense of a repository of possible meanings that are made actual by, for instance, the relative opposition between transcendence and immanence, this difference enabling dualistic categories, Cartesian and otherwise, to be maintained. In the context of my argument, virtual implies the set of immaterial social, political, historical, psychological, economic and spiritual relations that create the human subject's overriding context at a particular moment. The inherent virtual meanings are the results of complexes of cultural binding that create nodes of varying intensities in the networks of relations. Some of these nodes are thick and strong, while others are weak and thin. Their overall distribution in the plane of immanence is their ratiomatic identity, and it changes all the time. But subtle neural changes are continuously initiated by the variable conditions of this cultural milieu. Through its capacity to reorient and seek out alternative sites for connectivity, the brain thus sculpted is able to bind and suture itself to contextual peculiarity and difference. This cultured brain can also be properly termed the intensive brain.

In a system of network conditions that are pulsating and immanent, and therefore available only at certain times, what is present at any one moment will reflect the specific combinations of entities that are existent at the time of that reception. However, what is existent is dependent on a specific context in which these networks are embedded, and which is different for each network. Thus, each context creates a ratiomatic flow of immanent cultural meanings. This cultural memory then becomes the framework through which the cultured brain is produced. When each observer dies, those neurological changes that defined his or her experience and relationship to his specific generational moment within visual culture dies as well. Only in very unusual circumstances will these experiences find their way into the genome, as in the example of language. However, that generation's cultural effect is retained in traces within that cultural habitus, awaiting a new generation of brains on which to mould new kinds of neural relations, in the end creating new types of subjectivity. In other words, a kind of cultural somatic mnemotechny is

disseminated in forms of literature, visual art, architecture and design. Separately and together, as these practices evolve they create new forms of cultural attention.

Cultural attention delineates the subset of cultural forms and relations that call out to the developing brain, through its use of images, forms of language or social contingencies that in the end are important in the processes of sculpting the brain. It too is evolving, and becoming ever more sophisticated as its forms of spatiality and temporality become linked to ever more sophisticated forms of media. These new forms are beginning to adapt and synchronise themselves to those operating at the level of neural networks. This process is called visual and cognitive ergonomics, and will be addressed later in this essay. At the moment, it is critical to re-emphasise that this development is the result of the coincident effect of the evolution of optical and haptic projective and introspective technologies.

Recently, as a result of digital technologies, there has been a transformation of the conditions of culture itself, which has implications for the history of cultural attention. I am referring to the shift from an extensive to an intensive culture. Its precursors could be first found in earlier non-narrative film practice, exemplified by Soviet director Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) and Italian director Luchino Visconti's *Obsession* (1943). Film scholar Donato Totaro aptly sums it up: In the time-image, which finds its archetype in the European modernist or art film, characters find themselves in situations where they are unable to act and react in a direct, immediate way, leading to what Deleuze calls a breakdown in the sensory-motor system. The image cut off from sensory-motor links becomes a pure optical and aural image, and one that comes into relation with a virtual image, a mental or mirror image ^{f24}.

No longer tethered to the restrictions of the body and its narrative context of action and perception, the time-image is free to circulate according to other possible temporalities, some of recursive feedback on the body, producing new potentials and becomings.

According to contemporary philosopher Manuel De Landa, the term extensive time

^amay be applied to a flow of time already divided into instants of a given extension or duration, instants which may be counted using any device capable of performing regular sequences of oscillations. These cyclic sequences may be maintained mechanically, as in old clock-works, or through the natural oscillation of atoms, as in newer versions^{a25}

Intensive time, however, is characterised by nested sequences of temporality that form complex and multiplicitous relations with each other. A good example is found in the of the genomic regulatory system described by theoretical biologist Stuart Kaufman:

The network, in so far as it is like a computer programme at all, is like a parallel-processing network. In such networks, it is necessary to consider the simultaneous activity of all the genes at each moment as well as the temporal progression of their activity patterns. Such progressions constitute the integrated behaviours of the parallel-processing genomic regulatory system.²⁶

Thus, as we learn more and more about the brain and how it works, and as we begin to apply the power of computational technologies to answer some of the questions concerning its methods, we begin to see that neuro-scientific narratives based on linear modes of explanation are giving way to non-linear descriptions.

The Phylogeny of Projective Optical Technologies

One could hypothesise that the genealogy of optical instrumentation from the Renaissance to the contemporary moment is a story that recounts the history of the changing meanings of time and space. Photography most effectively reinvents and experiments with space, while cinema, building on this spatial practice, added new ways to deal with temporality. It animated and continues to animate space. Through the techniques of analog fast-cut editing, embedding fast-forward and reverse effects into narrative, and silhouetting as a means to illustrate the past, cinema reinvented the interpretation of time. As Hungarian artist and photographer L. Moholy-Nagy remarked with regard to Vertov's *The Camera Eye* (1924):

The combination of all these elements in their astonishing interchangeability revolutionises the customary visual as well as conceptual processes. It produces a completely new timing of perception based upon the translation of physical motion into pictorial motion, also the translation of the initial action into an objectively observable process viewed by the acting persons themselves. Though this may appear at first bewildering, one must acknowledge that a new code of space-time perception is in the making.²⁷

This experimentation of cinema with time does not occur in a vacuum, but is part of a network of conditions occurring in other fields similarly affected by concepts and interests involving temporal phenomena. Marcel Proust's *La Recherche du Temps Perdu* (In Search of Lost Time), a seven-volume semi-autobiographical novel published between 1913 and 1927, Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Albert Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* (1905) and his *General Theory of Relativity* (1915), and Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896) ; these paradigmatic writings all dealt with different experiences and formulations of time.

The field of new media, as it grew out of cinema and television, created a digital time and space: a space and time that is now folded, intensive and rhizomatic. Powerful information and communication technologies, such as the internet, undermine serial, extensive ideas of time and space. According to information cartographers Martin Dodge and Robert Kitchen, intensive technologies disrupt traditional forms of cultural and social interactions in critical ways: they promote a mode of global culturisation at the expense of local customs and traditions; they facilitate what has been termed incidental outsidership, meaning that people live in multiple locations; and they create an alternative sense of identity, one that is fluid, mobile and disembodied. Thus, community that had formerly been dictated by factors of presence and place is now formulated on the basis of interests rather than on location.²⁸

But these are not the only effects. In each case, these network relations leak out of the specificity of optical media into design, fashion and architecture; and, in the end, they radically alter the visual and haptic landscape. Can anyone imagine the folded, wandering, gestural movements of the Guggenheim Bilbao without Computer Assisted Design programmes, or the idea of the rhizome of Gilles Deleuze without the Minitel? The same visual landscape that, as we will see later, will help select the brain and affect identity. Linked together, these technologies create parallel systems of temporality that simultaneously manifest in time and space, like the genetic regulatory system or the model of the brain using the process of reentry, broadly defined as the synchronisation of neural events occurring in circumscribed and widely disparate areas of the brain.

Photographic spatiality, disrupted, linear and non-linear cinematic time and space, and digital, co-extensive time and space are all now folded together through the transductive force of binary code, which is assimilative. Remediation itself cannot be seen as anything but nomadic, non-linear and recursive. One media does not flow directly into another in a linear and positivist way, but is a series of jolts, digressions, regressions, informal mixings and bricolage. The material specificity of modernism has relinquished its hold on the imagination in today's world of pervasive symbiotic systems characteristic of the postmodern condition. The result is a grand tapestry of time and space that has resulted in new combinatory possibilities and, by extension, new possibilities for thought and creativity. As these nested relations redefine objects and images, they create landscapes of meaning; these visual ensembles are sampled and processed by the intensive brain.

Brain / Mind / World

The complexities under discussion here are precisely defined by philosophers of science Francisco J. Varela and Evan Thompson:

The nervous system, the body and the environment are highly structured dynamical systems, coupled to each other on multiple levels. Because they are so thoroughly enmeshed; biologically, ecologically and socially; brain, body and environment seem better conceived of as mutually embedding systems than as externally and internally located to produce (via emergence as upwards causation) global organism-environment processes, which in turn may affect (via downward causation) their constituent elements.²⁹

The genealogic relations of optical technologies, both projective and introspective, contain a number of meta-genealogic relations that influence the physical constituents of the instruments themselves, how they are made, the images they produce, and the effect these have on the brain and mind. I am referring to a number of processes categorised as visual and cognitive ergonomics³⁰. These two terms refer to the way that technology, combining the knowledge of neuroscience and physiological psychology with the advanced application and utilisation capabilities of computing and recent advances in special effects,

has created visual images that are more powerful than naturally occurring ones, with more enhanced potential for first calling out, and then selecting, the nervous system.

These processes employ and utilise sophisticated fields of what urbanist and theorist of technology Paul Virilio calls *phatic signifiers*. The word *phatic* shares the same root as *emphatic* (Gk. *emphanein*, to exhibit/display): it means something that forces you to look at it.

The *phatic* image ; a targeted image that forces you to look and holds your attention ; is not only a pure product of photographic and cinematic focusing. More importantly it is the result of an ever-brighter illumination, of the intensity of its definition, singling out brighter only specific areas, the context mostly disappearing into a blur.³¹

I use the expression *fields of phatic signifiers* to stress that these stimuli are linked up in large conglomerates of stimulation. Think for a moment of *branding*. The brand is only one part of large landscape of interconnected signifiers. Visual and cognitive ergonomics has been instrumental in the production of this *branded* environment. It refers to an evolution of these practices as they develop in the real/virtual interface as well as the world of bodily experience. The dialogue of optical instrumentation, neurophysiologic research and, more recently, advertising and computerised special effects, has impacted the configuration of visual space in which brands are embedded. The visual landscape has become more textual, and thereby more comprehensible, to an intensive brain that has undergone analogous, although idiosyncratic, changes consistent with its own material substance, its convoluted gyri and sulci consisting of millions of neurons, glia and blood vessels. As a result of experiential selection, new types of neuronal configurations leading to new patterns of neuronal discharge have emerged, reflective of this evolving visual space and time.

Phatic stimuli are produced according to the rules of visual and cognitive ergonomics, and as such have greater *attention-grabbing* qualities than those stimuli not so engineered. The development of these stimuli traces a history of increasing sophistication and simulation between them. This history is punctuated by moments of competition with each other for the brain's attention, followed by moments of cooperation when certain of these stimuli link up to form networks of stimuli, giving them emergent abilities far greater than they had before, in their isolated states. What emerges is an ecology of *phatic* forms, the human brain being its interface.

The neuro-anatomical and neuro-physiological condition of the living brain reflects its epigenetic experience. Epigenesis involves the processes by which genetically prescribed forms are altered by interaction with their environment, be it pre-, peri- or post-natal. The conditions of the developing brain, just like the conditions of the world, create specific environments that affect populations of neurons in specific ways that have crucial consequences for its neural architecture. That experience, having been recently dominated by the *phatically* charged, artificially constructed, cultural domains into which it is born, will

reflect a condition generated by intensive non-organic fields of stimulation. (As mentioned earlier in this essay, one could make a similar argument for other sensorial domains.) This condition is one in which naturally derived, organic stimuli and signs, such as trees or our own naturally conditioned feelings, have difficulty competing with phatic entities for the mind's attention. The story of Thomas in my essay *Blow-up: Photography, Cinema and the Brain* is about this problem.³²

If one superimposes the effect of global capitalism on this perceptual system, one begins to understand its staggering proportions; for it has the potential of producing and disseminating these stimuli worldwide, and to sometimes bizarre excess. Just think of the McDonalds brand, or the power of CNN. These highly engineered sign systems are distributed worldwide with incredible intensity. They have, in fact, become new media objects, according to cultural theorist and sociologist Celia Lury. A key theme in her analysis is the idea that the brand acts in the market like the interface of a computer: it is a mobile, dynamic and responsive framing of communication³³. She adds: Central to the interactivity of the brand are certain practices in marketing which function in an analogous way to programming techniques in both broadcasting and computing. The most significant example is the feedback loop³⁴ many marketing practices act like feedback loops of a computer programme³⁴. Products differentiate according to complex open autopoietic systems; self-limiting, self-generating, self-organising, self-maintaining and self-perpetuating (much like the cell); and through practices like marketing mix, with its model of the 4 Ps: product, price, place/distribution and promotion. Consumer surveys probe user desires, needs and wants, and link these to the use of the product as a marketing tool; this data enables the producers to finally create a kind of super-sized, *über* meta-object, a phatically compelling entity that is constantly becoming as it competes in a field of similarly differentiating meta-objects for the observer's attention.

The brand progresses or emerges in time in a series of loops, an ongoing process of (product) differentiation and (brand) integration. It thus comprises a dynamic sequence or series of loops that entangle the consumer³⁵, Lury concludes.³⁵ Brands also form corporate relations with other brands. For instance, the Coca Cola, Disney and Mars Corporations have joined up to form networks of brands that interconnect both synchronously (they all occupy one space simultaneously and react in a dynamic and non-linear fashion to create super-sized desire) and diachronously (they link to the history of other advertising campaigns in which, separately or together, they attempt to influence choice, perhaps in the parents of their target group, young children; this represents a kind of internal marketing in which the brand influences new consumers, children, by appealing to the nostalgia of the parent).

Brands are a distinctive form of phatic signifiers, particularly when they are produced with the use of special effects, or when they are embedded as products used in popular movies. They become attentionally intensified when they are linked up to global campaigns in which they participate in other global phenomena, such as the global flows of money, people, ideas, raw materials; and through which they interact with local food, languages and

cultural customs. These emerging properties, as they are expressed in the global context, can compete effectively for the attention of the global brain.

In a brain that has been selected for through the operation of neural Darwinistic and neural constructivist pressures, the spatial configurations of neurons and networks and their non-linear, dynamic neural signatures manifest as synchronous oscillatory potentials; they reflect the influence of this complex, competing, artificially created network of phatic signifiers that dominate the contemporary visual landscape. Drawing attention to these processes of binding and dispersal, I propose that as the systems of technical/cultural mediation become increasingly more folded, rhizomatic and cognitively ergonomic, they evolve to more closely approximate the conditions of temporal transaction that sculpt the intensive brain.

I would also hypothesise that there exists an envelope of possible formulas of output from the brain, a kind of virtual potential in the Deleuzian sense. As intensive culture evolves into more complex formations, it produces new dispositions that, when selected and coded by the brain, unlock that potential.

The brain is a becoming machine. The paradigms of neural plasticity and neural Darwinism provide the crucial frame for its continual renewal ; but also perhaps for its eventual subjugation^a

NOTES

1. Melanie Wells. In Search of the Buy Button*f*. In *Forbes Magazine* (1 September 2003), pp. 62-70.
2. But the first zone of the power centre is always defined by the State apparatus, which is the assemblage, that effectuates the abstract machine of molar overcoding: the second is defined in the molecular fabric immersing this assemblage; the third by the abstract machine of mutation, flows, and quanta*f*. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Continuum, 1988, New York) p. 227.
3. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000, Cambridge).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 23. Power is now exercised through machines that directly organise the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (welfare systems, monitored activities) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity*f*.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 33. The communication industries integrate the imaginary and the symbolic with the biopolitical fabric, not merely putting them at the service of power but actually integrating them into its very functioning*f*.
7. Gerald Edelman. *The Remembered Present* (Basic Books, 1989, New York), p. 45.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
9. From that process of competitive selection in the primary repertoire of cell groups, which is a process fundamentally based on variability, correlation, and connective re-entry, a secondary repertoire of neuronal groups will emerge. They will form a new representational map. The neuronal groups of this second repertoire, that is, of the newly formed map or network, will subsequently respond better to the individual stimuli that formed it. Further, the network as a whole will recognise those stimuli by responding to them categorically. Thus, by the selective process, the secondary network will have become a more effective

- representational and classifying device for perception, memory and behavior than the original, primary repertoire of cell groups^f. See Joaquin M. Fuster, *Cortex and Mind: Unifying Cognition* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 38.
10. A central hypothesis underlying remediation and enrichment programmes is that the brain is more malleable during infancy and early childhood than later in life. This malleability leads to an increased capacity for learning, which in turn provides an opportunity for the improvement of cerebral functioning that cannot be reproduced to the same extent or with the same ease later in life. This property of the immature brain is referred to as neural plasticity^f. See Peter R. Huttenlocher, *Neural Plasticity* (Harvard University Press, 2002, Cambridge), p. 53.
 11. S.R. Quartz and Terrence J. Sejnowski. The Neural Basis of Cognitive Development: A Constructivist Manifesto^f. In *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 20 (4), pp. 537-96.
 12. W.T. Greenough and F.L. Chang. Dendritic Pattern Formation Involves Both Oriented Regression and Oriented Growth in the Barrels of Mouse Somatosensor Cortex^f. In *Brain Research* 471, pp. 148-52.
 13. P.D. Coleman et al. Spatial Sampling by Dendritic Trees in Visual Cortex^f. In *Brain Research* 214, pp. 1-21.
 14. Beatriz Colomina. *Privacy and Publicity, Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (MIT Press, 1998, Cambridge), p. 139.
 15. Varela, F.J. et al. The Brainweb: Phase Synchronisation and Large Scale Integration^f. In *Nature Reviews, Neuroscience* 2, pp. 229-39 (2001).
 16. M. Le van Quyen. Disentangling the Dynamic Core: A Research Programme for Neurodynamics at the Large Scale^f. In *Biological Research* 36, pp. 67-88 (2003).
 17. Bolter and Guisins theory of remediation proposes that the history of media is a complex process in which all media, including new media, depend upon older media and are in a constant dialectic with them. Digital media are in the process of representing older media in a whole range of ways, some more direct and transparent than others. At the same time, older media are refashioning themselves by absorbing, repurposing and incorporating digital technologies^f. In (eds.) Lister, Martin et al, *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (Routledge, 2003, London), p. 55.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 78. So, for McLuhan, the importance of a medium (seen as a bodily extension) is not just a matter of a limb or anatomical system being physically extended (as in the hammer-as-tool sense). It is also a matter of altering the ratio between the range of human senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell), and this has implications for our mental functions (having ideas, perceptions, emotions, experiences, etc.)^f.
 19. John Morgan Allman. *Evolving Brains*^f (*Scientific American Library Series*, 1999, New York), p. 41.
 20. There are, grossly speaking, two kinds of nervous system organisations that are important to understanding how consciousness evolved^d The first is the brain stem together with the limbic (hedonic) system, the system concerned with appetite, sexual and consummatory behaviour and evolved defensive behaviour patterns. It is a value system; it is extensively connected to many different body organs, the endocrine system and autonomic nervous system^a It will come as no surprise to learn that the circuits in this limbic-brain stem system are often arranged in loops, that they respond relatively slowly (in periods of seconds to months), and do not consist of detailed maps. They have been selected during evolution to match the body, not to match large numbers of unanticipated signals from the outside world. These systems evolved early to take care of bodily functions; they are systems of the interior^f. See Gerald Edelman, *Consciousness: The Remembered Present*^f, in (eds.) Sporns, Olof and Giulio Tononi,

- Selectionism and the Brain* (Academic Press, 1994), p. 111.
21. Personal conversation with Gerald Edelman.
 22. Selection pressures affecting language must be considered as nested within one another to the extent that language evolution is nested in biological evolution. On the human side of this equation, the processing demands of symbolic reference, symbolic combination and symbolic communication in real-time provide novel selection pressures affecting the brain and vocal tract. As the language-mediated niche (the symbolic cultural environment) became more and more ubiquitous in human prehistory, these selection pressures would have become correspondingly more important and powerful, producing evolutionary changes in these structures in response. On the language side of this equation, the human-derived requirements of learnability, automatisability, and maintaining consistency with the constraints of symbolic reference provide selection pressures that affect language structures^f. See Terrence Deacon, *Multilevel Selection and Language Evolution*^f, in (eds.) Weber, Bruce H. and David Depew, *Evolution and Learning: The Baldwin Effect Reconsidered* (MIT Press, 2003, Cambridge).
 23. Very different, in our opinion, is the kind of definition which befits the sciences of life. There is no manifestation of life that does not contain, in rudimentary state, either latent or potential; the essential characters of most other manifestations. The difference is in the proportions. But this very difference of proportion will suffice to define the group, if we can establish that it was not accidental, and that the group, as it evolves, tends more and more to emphasise these particular characters. In a word, the group must not be defined by the possession of certain characters, but by its tendency to emphasise them^f. See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Dover Publications Inc., 1911).
 24. Donato Totaro. Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project^f. *Offscreen*, 31 March 1999.
 25. Manuel De Landa. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (Continuum, 2002, New York/London).
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
 27. L. Moholy-Nagy. *Vision in Motion* (Paul Theobald and Co., 1965, Chicago) p. 280.
 28. Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin. *Mapping Cyberspace* (Routledge, 2001, New York).
 29. See Francisco J. Varela and Evan Thompson, *Neural Synchrony and the Unity of Mind: The Neurophenomenological Perspective*^f, in (ed.) Axel Cleeremans, *The Unity of Consciousness: Binding, Integration and Dissociation* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 279.
 30. For a detailed analysis of these terms, see Warren Neidich, title essay in *Blow-up: Photography, Cinema and the Brain* (DAP, 2003), pp. 22-30.
 31. Paul Virilio. *The Vision Machine* (Indiana University Press, 1994, Bloomfield), p. 14.
 32. Blow-Up^f is the story of the mutated observer^f: one whose neural networks have been sculpted by artificial stimuli to the point that he has become what I call cyborgised^f. Thomas, who plays the role of the fashion photographer David Bailey, has two types of memory. One is the result of his own experiences; the other the result of the memories of the photographs he has taken. As the photographs are more phatic^f, they compete for the brain's neural space more effectively. He loses touch with his own feeling and memory when these are not supplemented by photographic documentation.
 33. Celia Lury. Just Do What? The Brand as New Media Object^f, inaugural address given at Goldsmiths College, London, 2004.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. *Ibid.*

In Search of the Centre

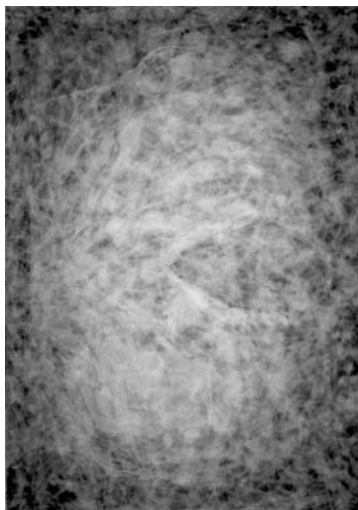
VLADO STJEPIC

The Loop, Kader Attia's new installation exhibited at Art Basel 2005, opens a more spiritual chapter dealing with the artist's questions. This installation consists of five ultra-realistic motorised dummies, literally self-looped. In this strange scene, a disc jockey strangled by the headphone wire hangs from the mirror ball revolving above him. On the deck, a scratched record relentlessly repeats the word 'GOD' while three break-dancers spin on their backs to the same rhythm as a whirling dervish spinning on his own axis, centre stage.¹ To give a better idea of the dimensions of the event, it must be added that the entire scene takes place in a circus tent at one of the most important art fairs in Europe.

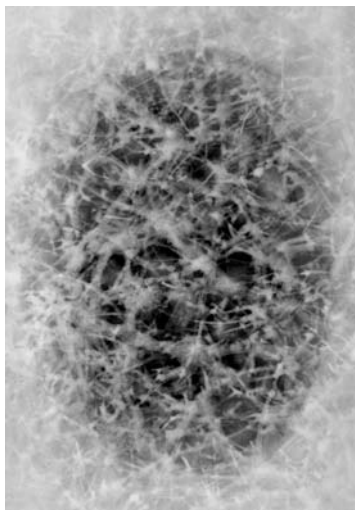
This installation immediately draws us into the vortex of contemporary art, culture and society. We can find characteristics of contemporary life everywhere: the disintegration of traditional rules and values, deterioration of hierarchies and authoritative structures, awareness of subtle, esoteric and spiritual realities, and the unmasking of make-believe truths. Tools, notions and structures used so far to give sense and justification to our existence seem insufficient, misleading, obsolete, empty and lifeless. There is a great hunger for meaning, aim and purpose in life, culture and society. "The greatest crisis of our age is the crisis of purpose", says the Slovenian violinist and cultural theorist Miha Pogacnik.²

How do science, religion and culture respond to this situation?

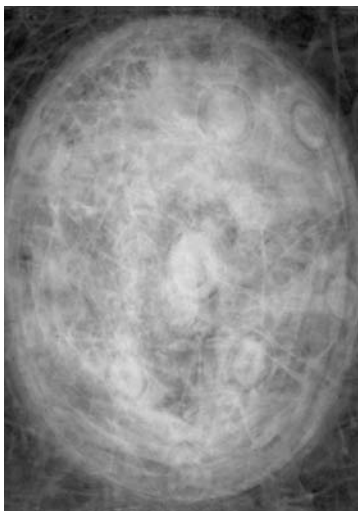
These domains are dominated by economics as the key model of thinking and functioning for most institutions and individuals. Those of us who live in former socialist countries have experienced an extended political period when this focus did not play an important role, so this explicit supremacy of economics above everything, including humanity, is alien to us.



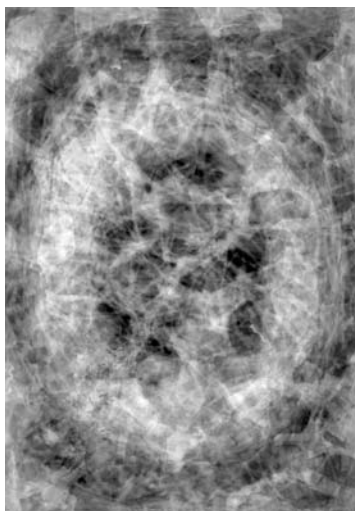
Dark Core, 1999, acrylic paint and acrylic emulsion on canvas, 130cm x 90cm



Formations II, 1998, acrylic paint and acrylic emulsion on canvas, 130cm x 90cm



Formation A, 1999, acrylic paint and acrylic emulsion on paper, 65cm x 50cm



Soft Ring, 1999, acrylic paint and acrylic emulsion on canvas, 130cm x 90cm

An astonishing level of scientific progress has been achieved in all areas; revelations of the most secret laws of humanity, nature and the universe seem to be at hand. Nevertheless, these achievements are contradictory, and often unwittingly confirm the ancient truths of 'mysticism'. And traditional religions continue to insist on their 'eternal truths', claiming that all evil and suffering are the result of disregard for religious and moral norms.

Since the 1960s, New Age groups have revived mystical and occult methods of gaining spiritual awareness, and attempt to rise above the 'filthiness' and 'antagonism' of this world. Such strategies are a result of a romantic approach to the world, and have a lot in common with ecological movements.

Through technology, art too has radically changed its relationship with the world. Art has plunged into the sea of information and new media, and has long abandoned the world of classical media. Consequently, the artistic domain has become a huge mirror of society, as well as an initiator of and participant in both mass and elite culture. Just as in the past we knew socialist realism, we are now witnesses to some kind of capitalist realism. Unlike utopian ideas embodied by art during the socialist period, what prevails today is carefully planned work, rationally based and analytical art projects that literally illustrate the ideas of their makers. Influenced by the mass of data that is now always and immediately accessible, the artist continually explores the sciences, sociology, ecology, economics, psychology and other human activities, automatically adopting their trajectories and methodologies. He uses a broad range of elements, such as tragedy, hopelessness, cynicism, alienation, humour, ideas; he takes a playful approach to new media and attempts to involve the viewer in an 'interactive' work of art. Yet today, some fundamental, introspective characteristics of art, such as explorations of beauty, creativity, experiment, improvisation and learning, seem to have disappeared. Now there is an unwritten rule that an artist whose work does not directly mirror pressing social problems is not adequately contemporary.

"A large part of art only serves as a global information mediator. This is very unfortunate. The artist must be very strong, very determined not to succumb to the temptation of holding a mirror to the world and society. Many artists work only as a reflection of the world; there are only a handful who are capable of something more real"³.

Our world is permeated with a sense of a vortex, imaged with equal power in forms that are subtle and microscopic, as well as immense and cataclysmic, such as tsunamis. In all this variety, frenzy and haste, in this whole quest for individual and collective identity, what we need most is support, a foundation, an unshakeable basis or an anchorage so that waves do not wash us away.

I cannot imagine any artist from any sphere of culture who would not explore the fundamental laws of nature, humanity, society, the universe, etc. During this exploration, he or she cannot but ask: "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why do things happen the way they do?"

Although these issues seem to belong to religion, on closer scrutiny we discover that various branches of science also deal with them: physics, astronomy, biology, genetics,

etc. So it transpires that all three areas of civilisation ; science, culture and religion, which are driving forces as well as domains of continual activity ; are involved in the search for answers to the same questions. Perhaps we are experiencing a completely new cosmic moment that demands new and different cultures, values and goals.

What are the main characteristics of this moment?

It is undoubtedly a completely different experience of time and space. The Slovenian conceptual artist and writer Marko Pogacnik says: "The tragedy of our civilisation is the fact that it is voluntarily confined to a limited space, and that consequently it has fallen behind the cosmic transformations of higher frequencies of existence. This is the source of friction that we experience around us as ecological disasters. We are victims of separated space³The transformation of space taking place now is cosmic, according to my perception. This means that we are being washed away by a wave of changes that cyclically spreads through the universe. Its source can lie only beyond the horizons of eternity. But since eternity is present in the nucleus of every human being as a holographic fragment, the wave of changes also spreads from the existential nucleus of many individuals ; of those who allow this to happen, which means that they embark on their own course of essential personal changes"⁴.

Like the perception and experience of space, the experience of time has also changed. The further away we are from the centre, the faster the edge of the wheel rotates and the greater the oscillations, rush and shortage of time. The author Mikhail Naimy describes this indescribable experience with these words: "The wheel of time rotates, but its axis is ever at rest. God is the axis of the wheel of time. Though all things rotate about Him in Time and Space, yet is He always timeless and spaceless and still. Though all things proceed from His Word, yet is His Word as timeless and spaceless as He"⁵.

Art history has clearly shown that only those works that are a result of the artist's direct spiritual experience, derived from the spiritual centre of a certain culture, have survived the passage of time and continue to give us aesthetic and spiritual pleasure. By this, I do not mean various spiritual movements and practices that are known under the common name New Age , but those authentic spiritual sources that were tapped by great spiritual messengers who attracted seekers and artists, along with kings, politicians, jurists and people from all walks of life. At these sources they quenched their thirst, strengthening and realigning their personal spiritual compasses.

In this context I understand the word religion (Lat. *re-ligio*): to re-connect with one's profoundest spiritual essence. From this connectedness and rootedness in one's centre works of art were born which continue to speak to us today.

We can ask ourselves what ancient Greece would have been like without its spiritual centres of Delphi and Eleusis, without Orpheus, "who was like a spirit animating sacred Greece, reviving its divine soul. His seven-stringed lyre embraced the entire world. Each string coincided with one of the modes of the life of the soul and contained the law of teaching and ability. Although we have lost the key to the fullness of its harmony, these different modes still echo in our ears. The lyre has spread this theurgic and Dionysian

impulse, which Orpheus skilfully translated to Greece, throughout Europe"⁶.

Another strong impulse in Europe was the movement of Catharism in southern France in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Cathars established the conditions for the emergence of the Renaissance in Italy and other parts of Europe.

If we focus on the early 20th century, the time when modernism was born, we discover that it coincided with the emergence of the Theosophical Society, which "spread from one country to another and was the dominant alternative culture for a while. It was like a 'school' referred to by artists and seekers expecting to find a radically different idea of the world and man"^{7a}

The "secret doctrine" of Helena P. Blavatsky had an undisputedly great influence on the intellectuals of that time. "Einstein kept her book on his desk, Edison had a diploma in theosophy, and the theosophical philosophy influenced many authors such as T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Jack London, George W. Russell and William Butler Yeats. The painters Paul Gauguin, Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian used theosophy as a vehicle in their search for different worlds of perception"⁸. It was an attempt at seeing the world from a different perspective and adjusting to the cosmic rhythm of the period. Artists and intellectuals spontaneously felt the need to find the right direction and establish a connection with the spiritual source: theosophy.

And what about today?

The basic forms of human expression, such as the word, voice, movement, leaving a trace ; a line, colour ; are inseparably connected with man and cannot be replaced with any technology or media. Since the practice of drawing has accompanied humans as they evolved over millennia, why can it not do the same today?

If different events such as hunting, the birth of a child or the romantic admiration of a landscape can be expressed in a drawing, can this form of art also express contemporary human experience? Like everyone, I am occasionally impressed by the possibilities offered by information and computer technology, but at the same time I feel that I would be bereft of something important if I had no opportunity for direct artistic expression through line and colour. I think this mode of visual art contains a much greater and more crucial facet of human experience than the technological exploration of artistic problems or the formal applications of different media. Such a conviction encouraged theorist and curator Emma Dexter to give her text about drawing the title "To draw is to be human"⁹.

What gives such art the particular strength and significance that enables it to continue to be relevant and transformational today?

I think it is the holistic experience it offers, first to the artist and then also to the viewer. This entails a whole range of processes or experiences that are present in one's art: thought, conception, emotion, awareness and the subconscious. In short, a whole range of psychological states ; but also a movement, through the hand, of the entire body, the participation of all senses. During such moments of creativity, the artist feels anchored in the depths of his being. He experiences himself as a microcosm in the midst of a macrocosm, connected with all of creation. This experience of larger unity is so profoundly

human and authentic that it cannot be replaced by any other medium.

The viewer directly responds to such art, because its energy resonates with something deep within and activates emotional, mental or subconscious elements that were previously hidden. A whole chain of authentic experiences is triggered, which is directly experienced as our own, without media acting as a mediator.

Maybe the vortex that we experience is trying to wake us up and draw our attention to our condition as holographic fragments of eternity, directing us to a hidden treasure buried deep within us, our only guiding light out of the labyrinth of contradictions and limitations, and able to show us new horizons.

NOTES

1. Charlotte Léouzon and Kader Attia. *The Loop*, mixed-media installation, Basel (2005).
2. Miha Pogacnik. *Delo*, Ljubljana, 6 March 2004.
3. Jan Fabre. *Deloskop*, 3.6.-9.6., Ljubljana, 2004.
4. Marko Pogacnik. *Artwords*, Nos. 71, 72 (Ljubljana, 2005).
5. Mikhail Naimy. *The Book of Mirdad: The Strange Story of a Monastery Which Was Once Called the Ark* (Arkana Penguin, 1993).
6. Edouard Schuré. *The Great Initiates: A Secret History of World Religions* (Belgrade, 1989).
7. Ursula Seiler. "Art: Between Madness and Ideal". *Zeitschrift*, No. 40 (2003).
8. Ibid.
9. Emma Dexter. *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* (Phaidon, 2005).

Rupass 15

Like Chuspatera

PARISMITA SINGH



The year I came into College was a particularly eventful one. The University, newspapers told us, had the largest collection of perverts and psychopaths in the world. Most of us took this in our stride though. In fact, we quite reveled in it...

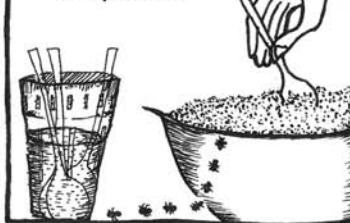


But like people in every warzone, we were



beginning to learn the ropes

A HAND CAN REACH OUT TO GRAB YOUR BREASTS OR DRAG YOU INTO A CAR IN BROAD DAYLIGHT



BUT AFTER NIGHTFALL, IT'S MUCH SIMPLER. THERE ARE THE RULES, AND IF YOU FOLLOW THEM, YOU STAY OUT OF TROUBLE.



IF YOU'RE WALKING ALONE AT 8 AT NIGHT - IT'S BECAUSE YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER



AND WHEN A CAR WITH A MALE DRIVER SLOWS DOWN CLOSE TO YOU, IT'S TO GET THE DEAL THROUGH.

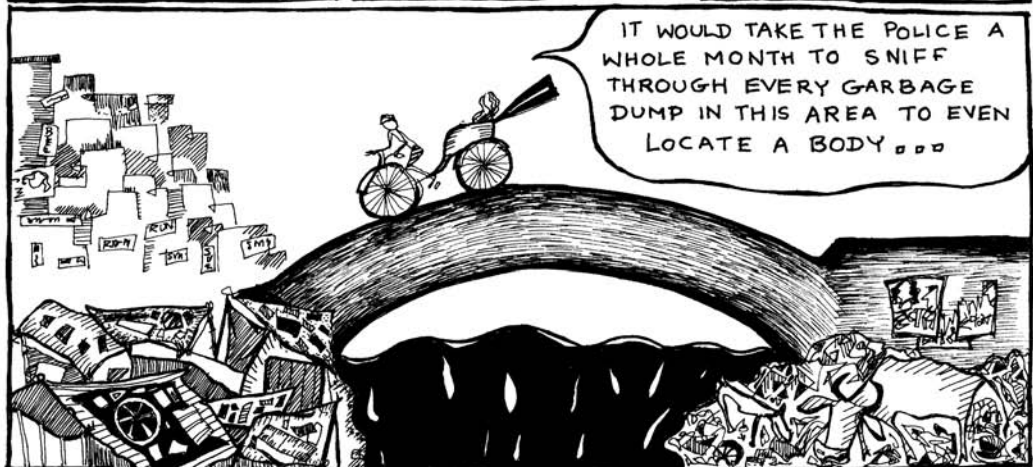


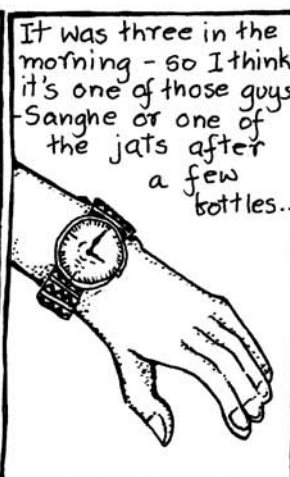
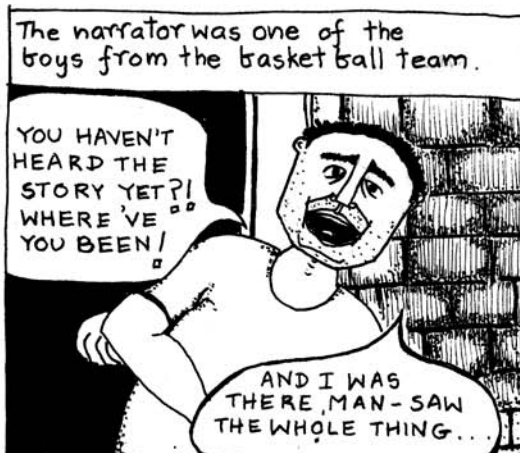
THAT'S SCARY!

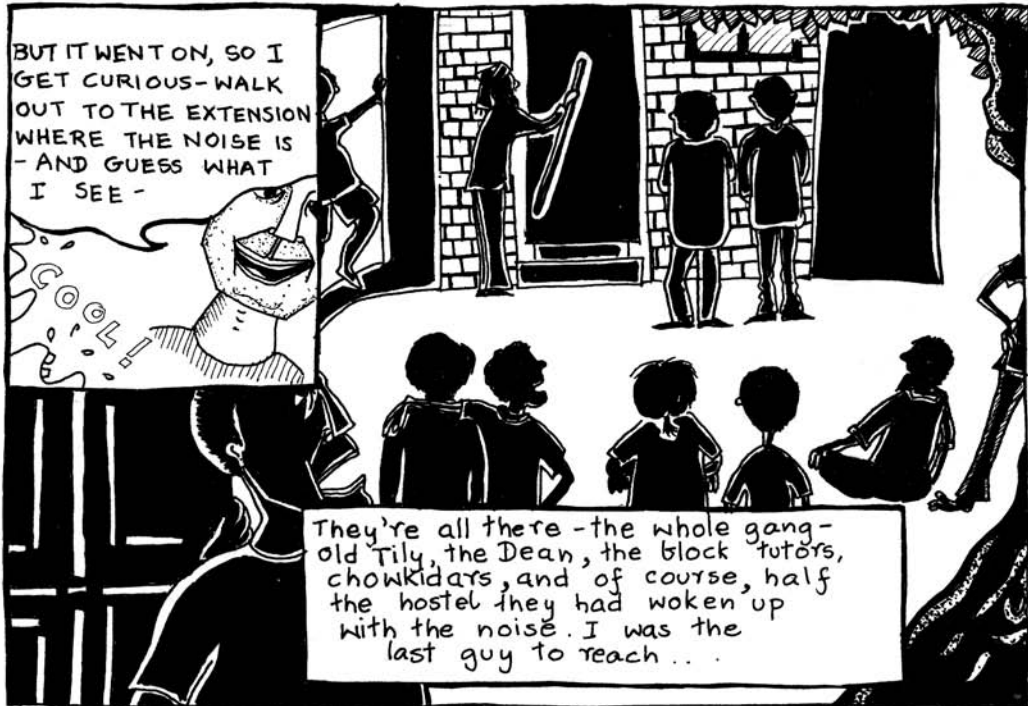


SO, IF YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS IGNORE THE CAR, DON'T MAKE A FUSS HE'LL GO AWAY









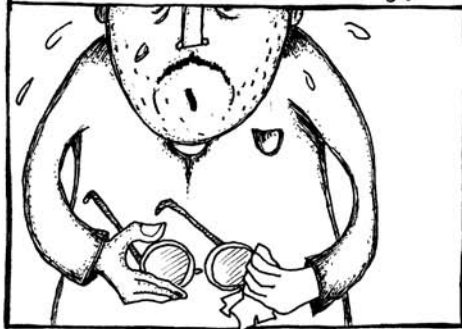
Then I realize it's not a dope room... can't be. All this while, the chowkidar keeps ramming the door.



He's enjoying himself too. It's a shitty job having to walk around all night with nothing to do but smoke bidis. Unless something like this happens once in a while.

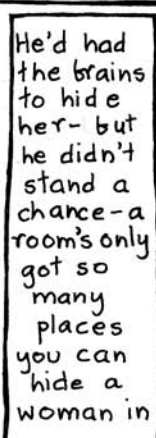
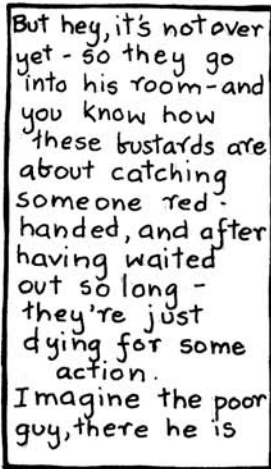


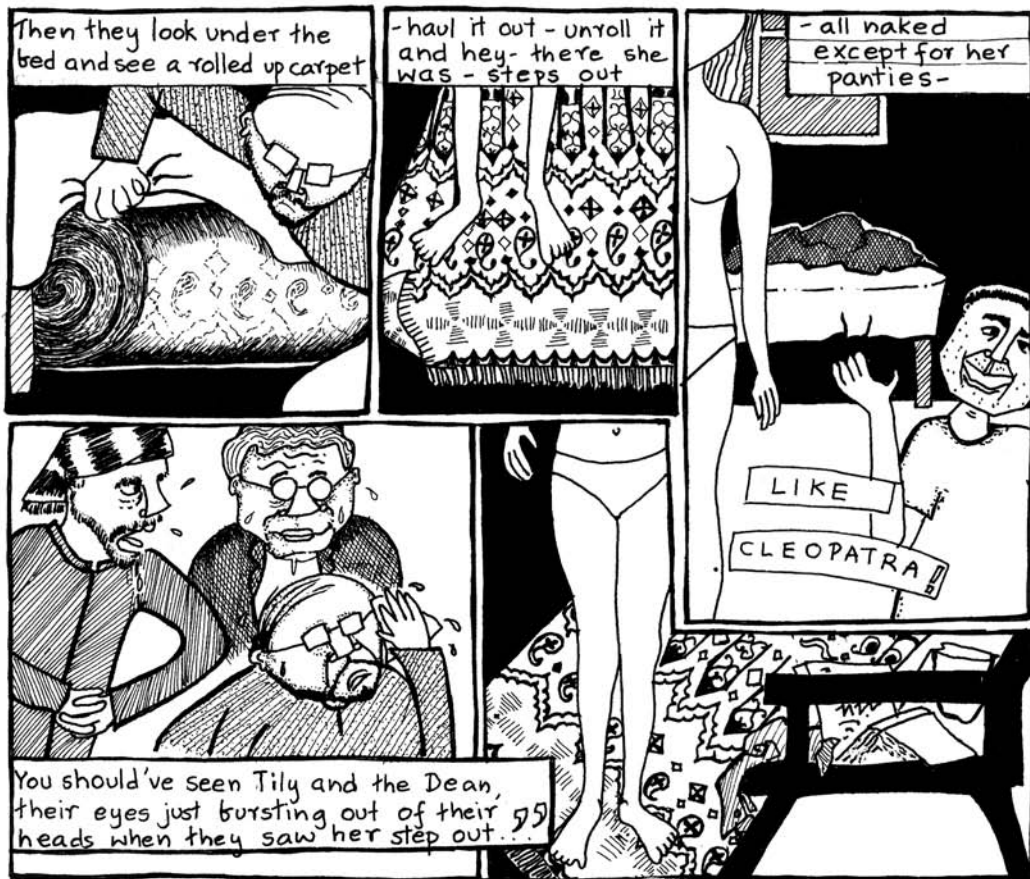
Everybody except R.J. who does not have a taste for violence and looks like he wants to run off.

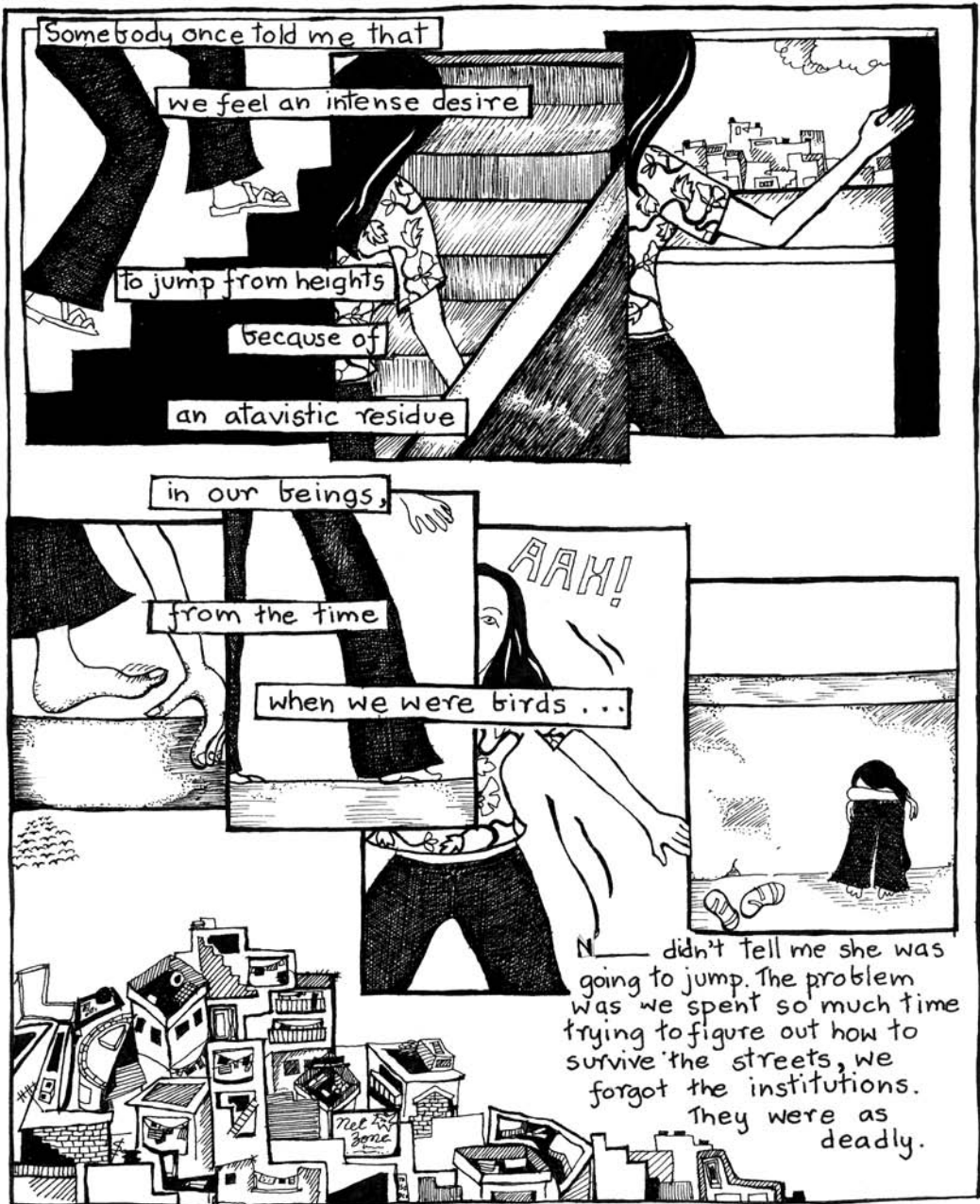


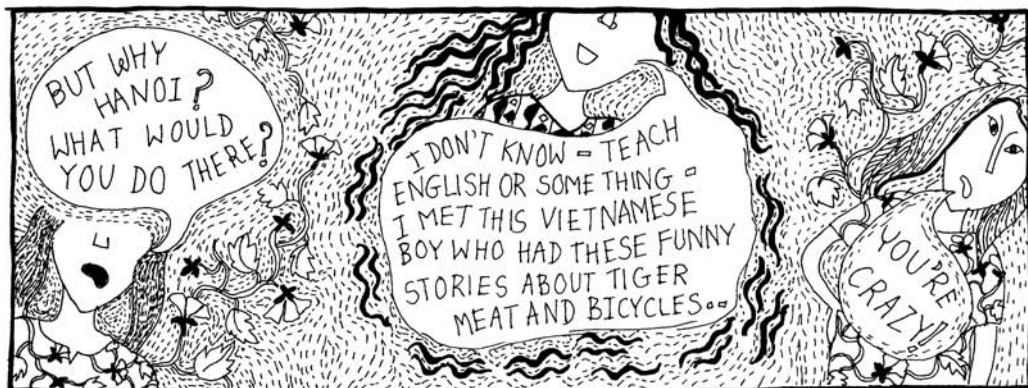
There was a bit of a chill too but nobody seemed to feel it. Everybody was just hanging around waiting to see what happens next. The strange thing was the silence-though there were so many people out there- it's absolutely silent except for the sound of the chowkidar's stick rapping at the door.



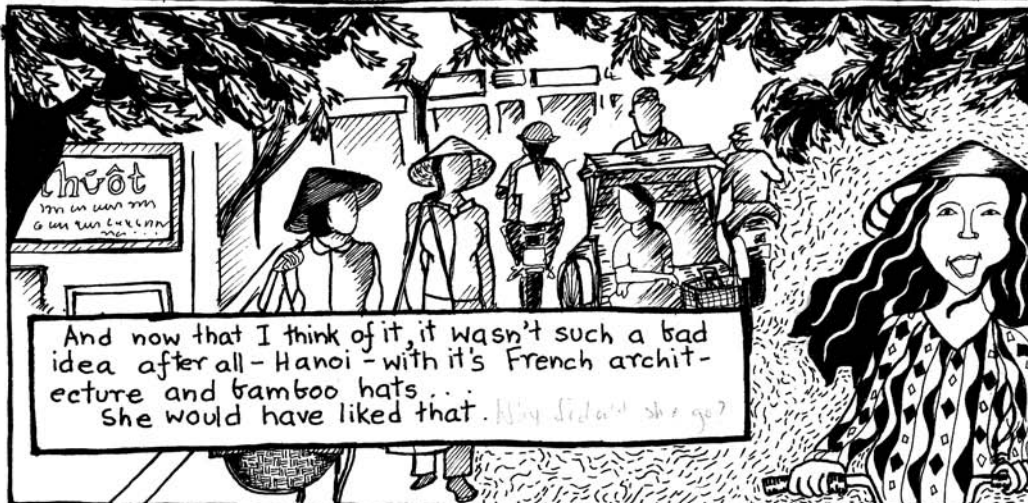








I wonder why she didn't think of it, after the hostel incident. We could've put together some money for her to go away - to Burkina Faso or Hanoi - or Hanoi - or wherever else they needed English teachers...



THỨNG

Strange Days

The History and Geography of Turbulence

A word cloud visualization of the word "turbulence". The word is repeated numerous times in various sizes, orientations, and colors (including shades of blue, green, and yellow). The words are arranged in a dense, swirling pattern, creating a sense of movement and chaos. The background is a solid light blue color.

*Jahan se Dekhiye Yak Shor-e Shor-angez Nikle Hain*¹
(A Riot of Turbulence, Wherever You Look)f:
The Dehlvi *Ghadar*

MAHMOOD FAROOQUI

TURBULENCE = *SHOR*, *SHORISH*, *GHADAR*

SHOR ; *ghul*, *ghapara*, *aashob*, *fitna*, *fasad*, *hangama*, *balwa*, *fatoor*
Turbulence, pandemonium, affliction, disorder, riot, commotion

SHORISH ; *shor-o ghogha*, *balwa*, *ghadar*, *fasad-o fitna*, *afratafri*, *hangama*, *khalbali*
Outburst, mayhem, rebellion, riot/disturbance, helter-skelter, turbulence

GHADAR ; Perfidy, faithlessness, ingratitude; fraud, villainy; mutiny, rebellion, sedition, riot, disturbance, confusion, tumult, noise, bustle

Shor surrounds the *Ghadar*,² event and discourse, equally. There is the *shor* of the very word *ghadar*, the *shorish* of the mutineers, the triumphant *shor* of the colonial master-narrative and the feeble *shorish* of the nationalist histories. Amid this noise and commotion, what I acutely miss is the *shor-angezi* (tumult-exciting) of the modern, contemporary voice. While the *adivasis* (indigenous), the subalterns and the discourses of colonial rule produce dozens of historical theses, the *Ghadar* invites few onlookers, fewer revisionists and absolutely no trespassers. The *shorish* that surrounds it, therefore, is old, dusty and hoary.

This essay is an infiltrator's voice, a sneak preview of some voices submerged in turbulence. This is a preface, but one with a very tenuous connection to the material that follows. The immense turbulence of 1857 continues to beg for adequately avid readers.

The *Ghadar* compels us to think of it counterfactually, while at the same time the impossibility of doing so is self-evident. To treat the *Ghadar* as a failure, which in very superficial terms it was, is to imagine in an underhand way the possibility of its success, which, alas, would be the greatest counterfactual of Indian history. Barely posing that question, to try to think of the success the *Ghadar* could have achieved opens up the realm of the ludicrous as well as the fantastic. Would the march of civilisation, of capitalism, of modernity, have been halted, even temporarily, by the furious anger of the pandies³? Would the continuous Europeanisation of the earth have been hampered, had the sepoys been better organised and more tactically astute while attacking the besieging English; at Kanpur, Lucknow, Jhansi or Delhi?

The *Ghadar* thus suffers twin, equally debilitating blows. Even as it is indicted on purely counterfactual grounds, the very moment of its occurrence is stymied by the fact of the aftermath. Another, better, more civilised and far more familiar kind of anti-colonial movement is about to rise on the horizon; within five years of the restoration of the Jama Masjid to the Muslims of the city in 1864 (after it had been used as a stable, as a public lavatory and as a camp for Sikh soldiers), Mahatma Gandhi would be born; in less than 20 years the Congress party would be formed to lead the proper national movement; in less than 30 years, the Muslim League would be formed. In the midst of this *shor*, the *shorish* of the *Ghadar* appears at best, stultified; at worst, a terrible utopia.

This greatest show of Hindu-Muslim unity, a utopian stage, if there was one, for the forthcoming scenes in the long act of Indian nationalism, disturbs and intimidates us. Hindu soldiers and Muslim civilians; fanatic *jehadis* and soothsaying *pundits*; *maulvis* and *rajas*; this togetherness is not of the kind which attracts us. Senile rulers, marauding troopers, murderous civilians, harassed citizens, the play of each man for himself, the lack of leadership, organisation, tactic and vision: this is not the darkened light, the night-scarred morrow⁴ we have in mind as a redemptive unfolding of Indian history.

It is difficult, then, to think passionately about the *Ghadar*, that most passionate and protracted of battles ever fought on Indian soil. How does one generate passion for soldiers who represented the worst and best of the mercenary spirit that had been so typical of the Indian military market for so many centuries? The well-fed, spoilt children of the Company, not fighting *against* but to preserve the privilege they already enjoyed? What progressive threads can be found in the multitude of detached and almost contemporaneous incidents⁵? Besides, are those threads worth investigating, knowing, as we do, the fact of their eventual abortion? And if sticking it properly into the English is all we are looking for, then this is only one of the insurgencies against colonial rule, a little more widespread but no more bloody than the scores that preceded it, or indeed, were to succeed it; from Vellore to the Santhals of Chhota Nagpur, from the Wahhabis of Syed Ahmed to the Faraizis of Titu Mir, from the Burmese and Afghan wars to the long rebellion of Prince Mahmud in Java, Indonesia.

Besides, they got it back as good as they gave.

It is impossible, then, to study the *Ghadar* and escape colonial triumphalism; and that is another reason why it takes particular gumption to research it. To delight in the killing of

one Englishman is to overlook the burning of thousands of villagers, the decimation of entire populations and habitations. To celebrate the holding of Delhi or Lucknow forces one to quietly digest the ignominy of a handful of Englishmen holding on to their positions, outnumbered by hundreds to one and surrounded by hostility, as the besieged everywhere were. To describe the valour of the mutineers is to suffer the overbearing brutality of a Hodson or a Nicholson,⁶ to celebrate the camaraderie between the mutineers and the ordinary people is to be subject to the bullying of the *sharif*, the mutilation of gentility that so disgusted Ghalib,⁷ and to stomach the dissension and the factionalism that tore the insurgencies apart. For each Rani Jhansi there is a Scindia, for each Kunwar Singh a Patiala, for each Taluqdar a Nizam, for each Zafar a Ghalib⁸

So if there is no progress, nor progressivism, if there is neither modernity nor colonial discourse, if there is no unity and only a partial agency, if there is no vision and only a makeshift strategy; then what can we invoke when we think of the *Ghadar*? After the heat of Independence and the dust of the Mutiny settles down, we are left, then, to study rumour⁸; or to probe, in the course of our search for the subaltern, the climate of fear, distrust, apprehension and expectations⁹.

But where is the subaltern in the mutiny? The camp followers, perhaps, or the potter, the baker, the grass-cutter, the water-carrier, the coolie, the carpenter; but it appears, ever so dismayingly, that despite his ubiquitous presence on the scene, the subaltern is wholly absent in the discussion. For the colonials, he is there as a mark of assertion, as an attestation to the fact that the colonial has still, despite the imminent threat to his life and status, not lost the superiority, and its sense, that makes him a colonial:

As arrogant, as intolerant, and as fearless as ever, we still closed our eyes to the fact that our lives lay in the hollow of the hand which we so despised. Even in the midst of disasters and humiliation, which would have softened and enfeebled others, our pride of race still upheld us, stern, hard and immovable.¹⁰

On the Indian side, the subalterns are the *badmash*, the *badkhwaah*¹¹ who, disguised as sepoys, were looting shops in Delhi, blackmailing residents to part with money on threat of declaring them as supporters of or providers of refuge to the English; these subalterns were ruffians, settling private scores when the world turned upside down. As for the labourers, workers, artisans who were being commandeered, conscripted and forced into choosing a side, there is a terrible silence surrounding their activity. For each soldier, ten camp followers on either side. Who are they, why are they there in this unpaid and unprofessional war, how do they resist, who do they resist?

When the hurly burly is done, though, we return eventually to where we started from. As the master framed this most masterly of narratives, here is the trapping we have not yet escaped from; a multitude of detached and almost contemporaneous incidents, the only connecting link being the universal fact that the Black man had risen against the white¹².

Still, there was turbulence, there was rumour, there was a threat to, and dissolution of, established authority; there were over 70,000 professional soldiers, the best in the world; there were about 30,000 volunteers, joined by thousands of ordinary people, *maulvis*,

pandits, zamindars (landowners), servicemen, poets, scholars, gamblers, sellers of *bhang*,¹³ all involved in the war for Delhi. Mobs were looting houses on the charge, or pretext, that the inhabitants were supporting the English. Crowds were resisting soldiers on a rampage. Princes were rediscovering power; paupers were aggrandising themselves; the price of gold was touching the sky; rumours abounded everywhere; the Englishmen were dressing like Indians; the bands of armies fighting against them were playing English bands and their songs; the *sharif* (gentility) were being forced to eat *kaddu* and *baingan*;¹⁴ women were eloping with lovers; courtesans and prostitutes were thriving; Indians were appointing themselves Commissioners and Collectors and Colonels and Generals; grain was being hoarded; a cacophonous contest for information was continuing apace in the midst of the felling of telegraph wires; ideologues were thundering the language of apocalypse and doomsday and of the hundredth anniversary of the battle of Plassey, and reminding their Hindu brothers of the *Mahabharata* and of Krishna;¹⁵ and all this in Delhi itself, let alone other cities, other centres.

The following documents were extricated and extracted from various sources in the city by the occupying English army ; from the *kotwali* (police station), the secretariat, homes, spies; each one diligently marked and copied, sometimes in triplicate, stored as a monument for posterity, one of the great founding moments of the colonial archive. There are thousands of these documents stored in the National Archives, indexed in a published catalogue called the Mutiny Papers . For all the colonial intentionality motivating this extensive, meticulous and arduous classification, they provide one of the densest descriptions of a city at war and at work, of administration and anarchy, of deceit and desperation. Many of these documents have never even been seen by anyone. There are enough unopened pages and chapters of Indian history here to keep a few of us going, for a distance and duration far beyond the *shor(es)* of the impending 150th anniversary of the *Ghadar* in 2007.

UPHEAVAL

Noble men and great scholars have fallen from power; and the lowly ones, who have never known wealth or honour, now have prestige and unlimited riches. One whose father wandered dust-stained through the streets now proclaims himself ruler of the wind.

; Ghalib, *Dastanbu*¹⁶

But we must needs regret the fact that unlike other cities where the ordinary people made efforts and joined the action in killing and putting away the Kuffars (infidels) the people of our city did not play their desired role and were defamed for nothing. It is also to be regretted even more that the Victorious army which has staked its life and is constantly facing death and is devoting its day and night to the task [of ejecting the kaffirs for our sake] are not being properly taken care of by our compatriots, their food and shelter is not being provided by those who have the means to contribute so but show no regard for it.

; *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, 12 July

Collection 67, No. 143

[Undated]

The Lord of the World and the Universe,

The Gwalior cavalry camping on top the Haweli of Farashu Saheb has so oppressed the entire *mohalla* (neighbourhood) that it is impossible to describe it. Initially they used to dish out some money to the *mohallawallahs* (residents) for expenses, etc., but in spite of that they would treat the residents so badly that they would catch hold of each of us and forcibly demand money and seize something here and there. After our request a guard of platoons was appointed by the *Sirkar* so the residents give upkeep to the guards but the riders broke all limits last night when they went to the *Thanadar* and told him that we do not get to eat therefore we are going to plunder the *mohalla*. The residents therefore spent a terribly sleepless and anxious night. This can be verified by the report of the *Thanadar* or the *Hawaladar* of the platoon. Therefore we plead that orders be given to the *Risaladar* of the said platoon that they should leave this *mohalla* and go someplace else [then it will be] true Mastership and justice.

Devoted,

Gobind Rai,

Pratap Singh and all the residents of the *mohalla*

Collection 67, No. 46

14 July 1857

Your Exalted Majesty,

This poor and helpless widow owns a *kothi* (house) and thirteen shops at *guzar* Kashmiri Gate as a way for her subsistence. Four five days ago some 30 horsemen and some *Tilangas*¹⁷ intruded into the *kothi* by force and coercion and have encamped there. The poor servant could not protest or do anything out of fear and terror. My submission is that the truth is that *kothi* and those shops are my only assets and even their rent barely provides for me and my dependents.

Further plea is that because of the army's stay my house is likely to be destroyed and wrecked. Therefore I hope that out of your inestimable generosity and mercy Your Majesty would cast a glance and issue orders that this poor one's house should be vacated so that this servant can achieve justice and spend the rest of her life praying for the everlasting strength of your Majesty.

Widow,

Qasim Khan deceased

[Order ; By this order the officers of the army are directed to get the house and the shops of the widow vacated. Act promptly.]

Collection 100, Number 60

29 June 1857

My dearest brother Khizr Sultan,

The soldiers of the platoon are removing the hooks, beams and planks from the bridge on the Jamna river and the whole bridge is being looted/broken. An order has come from His Majesty regarding the upkeep of the bridge. Therefore you are being instructed to immediately make arrangements for securing the bridge so that no sepoy can take the rings or the planks from the bridge otherwise it will be destroyed.

Mirza Zaheeruddin, Commander-in-Chief

[Response ; The orders have been executed as demanded.]

CONVULSION

Behold, whose prowess has reduced them to this state, it was their own soldiers too. And from what we are hearing, the attitude of the rest of the soldiers would be manifest too. Do you not see, you sceptics, the supremacy of the prowess of the Almighty over the might of the Christians, that you still maintain their infallibility and wonder who can stand against the Angrez (English). This is the reason [belief] because of which many of the notables, nobles and Kings, especially from Rajputana, have not supported us, and apart from them there are many who are actively supporting the Angrez, but such is God s doing that most of them are chastised and are punished. Remember the Angrez have earned God s wrath.

; Delhi Urdu Akhbar, 12 July

Collection 135 (No. unspecified)

9 August 1857

Royal Edict to all Officers of the Army

This is the order of the King, that first of all the fact is that I did everything that suited the sepoys pleasure and left nothing undone from my side. I had made a compact with the troops that they are like my children, and just as children insist on something and are mollified, I too agreed to all your insistence and did everything to keep you happy. Unfortunately you showed no consideration even for my life, nor did you heed my old age^a If it is not agreeable to you then take me to *Khwaja Saheb*.¹⁸ He protects everyone and I will go there and become an attendant (sweeper) and stay there. If that is also not possible I will get up and leave, let us see who can stop me. How does it matter whether I am killed by you or by them. And all the oppression against my subjects is being committed not on them but on me, therefore it should be immediately taken care of. Otherwise give me an answer. I will do as I say and sleep. And a box of his Exalted Highness has also gone missing when Hakim Ahsanullah Khan s house was looted. Any paper signed with the seal in the box dating after 16 Zialhijja is invalid.

The same thing is true for vegetables and saag (spinach). People have been found to complain that even kaddu and baingan cannot be found in the bazaars. Potatoes and arvi (yams) when available are of stale and rotten variety, stored from before by farsighted kunjras.¹⁹ From the gardens inside the city some produce does reach a few places but the poor and the middle class can only lick their lips and watch them (as they are earmarked for the select).

; Delhi Urdu Akhbar, 14 June

Collection 135, No. 168

[Undated]

Commander-in-Chief to the *Kotwal*

The brave and distinguished Syed Mubarak Shah Khan *Kotwal* Shahar,
Your application, along with the note of the *Thanadar* of the Kashmiri Darwaza to the effect that because of the unavailability of materials of war the soldiers are hell-bent on conducting a house search there passed our eyes. It is hereby ordered that you should go and figure out which platoons these soldiers belong to. A proclamation has been passed in all platoons that whoever suspects [the presence of] any magazine stuff anywhere should first inform the government, along with the informant [who spotted it]. Afterwards through the *Kotwali* a search will be conducted. Tell the *Sipahis* (soldiers) that they should first go to the General *Bahadur* with the informant and submit an application there, when an order is passed from there a search will be conducted. Without the application of the spy/informant no searches will be conducted at respectable people's houses...

Collection 62, No. 167

5 September 1857

The Guide of the Universe, Master of the World, His Lordship General Commander-in-Chief, may your fame be eternal.

Your Lordship, at some eleven o'clock Allah Bakhsh, resident of Chandni Chowk came and said that 500-600 men have surrounded *Munshi* Abdul Waheed who are about to humiliate him and are demanding two hundred Rupees. The devoted one instantly reached the house of the said *Munshi* with a police patrol and ammunition and took stock to discover that in reality there were some five-six hundred people and some 150 ruffians of the city. They were saying that give us the money otherwise we will humiliate you and had also stopped a cow and a carriage from making its way to Saharanpurr and were demanding a hundred Rupees failing which they would wreak excesses. When the devoted one tried to dissuade them from rioting they unsheathed their swords and made to attack the devoted one and the soldiers. My Lord had I not been accompanied by grenadiers and soldiers of war I am sure we would have lost our lives and they would have looted all the shops in Bazaar Chandni Chowk...

With the greatest respects,

May the Sun of the Kingdom shine forever,

Devoted,

Syed Nazar Ali *Thanadar*,

Chandni Chowk

Collection 63, No. 41

16 August 1857

The Son of the Preceptor of the Universe, the Crown Prince Lord Commander in Chief,
My Lord,

The application of the residents of Faiz Bazar regarding the collection of money from the deprived and the indigent people of the city against Lala Jatamal Sahukar despite the government's orders to the contrary has passed your eyes. There was a government order that indigent people should not be taxed. The intention is not to hurt anyone, therefore the applicants have submitted their evidence/witness and await your Lordship's command.

With the greatest respects,

Deputy *Kotwal*,

Khuda Bakhsh Khan

[Note ; After examining the petition in the said case an order was passed that Jatamal Sahu, the resident of Dehli Darwaza is to be summoned through the Faiz Bazar *Thanadar*.]

Collection 67, No. 73

27 July 1857

Abstract ; Deposition of Imam Khan regarding his arrest.

Name ; Imam Khan, s/o Mutawakkil Khan, *Qaum*²⁰ ; Pathan, Resident ; Akbarabad, Occupation ; shopkeeper, illiterate.

Q. Why have you been arrested?

A. The deponent was a shopkeeper of flour and pulses, etc., with the English platoon. I had come here to the Ridge where the English platoons have dug trenches. I imagined that if I die here then I will go straight to hell. Somehow I should join the Islamic forces. When I found the time I left at nine in the morning with merely a pair of clothes and some cash. When I reached the Ridge some ten-twelve *Gujars* met me and caught me and took me to a garden. They seized the money and the clothes and left me. It has been five days since I presented myself to his Majesty. I had wished to take the arms from his Majesty to go and fight the enemies. Now I beseech his Majesty that I should be given some arms so that I can join the Islamic force and fight the enemies.

Q. Do you have any acquaintances?

A. I have no acquaintance here. Only my faith, for I am a Muslim, and that is my only proof and witness.

Collection 61, No. 369

14 August 1857

After all the due respects the submission is this that all the officers that are there style themselves Colonel *Sahibs* and as Generals, please inform the humble one about the ranks and proper forms of address for them because at the time of writing applications to them there is great difficulty. One doesn't know which mode of address will please them and which will displease them. Please write as soon as possible.

Kotwal, Delhi

We believe that despite witnessing all that has happened there are many in our country who are still in awe of the Angrez. They are not convinced that the government has fallen and

hope it will be shortly restored. We warn them, they must atone for it by seeking God's favour and thus cure themselves. They should recite the Quran and know that this sickness has come upon them due to their lack of faith. They should offer Namaz, read the Quran aloud and with feeling and try and cleanse their souls. They should read the previous issues of this paper where we have listed many [Quranic] verses dealing with the greatness of God and the fate of doubters and disbelievers.

ı *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, 12 July

Collection 53

[dated between 19 May and 10 August 1857]

The *Darogha Saheb* and the kind and benevolent *Thanedars* of this city,
As per the government's order you should please call the following merchants and send them with *Jamadar* Jawahar Singh. If anybody resists then let us know so we can send a contingent to arrest him.

Abdul Hakeem Khan, *Kotwal*

- Govardan Das Kabulwallah
- Nuna Mal
- Gulab Rai
- Harihar Ram
- Chandi Mal
- Suraj Bhan
- Lala Zorawar Chand
- Lala Kirori Mal
- Nandkishore Topkhanawallah
- Bulaqi Das
- Uttam Chand Bulaqi Das
- Bihari Lal

But those who are Muslims may heed the signs and those of Hindu Dharm should light their hearts with the refulgence of their faith. Except the Adipurush, the Primeval Deity, nothing is permanent. They should look at their religious books [and see] how many magnificent dynasties and kingdoms came into being in the land of Hindustan and how they all met their end. Ravana, the King of Sarandeeep who had an army of demons until he was beaten by Raja Ramchandra, the Suryabanshi Rajput. Nothing can withstand divine resolution. Kans, the ruler of Mathura, what a powerful King who conquered the whole word and made to assault the Inderlok itself, when in the Yadukul family was born Shri Krishna Maharaj who [so defeated him] that except his name nothing was left. Apart from that the Kshatriya clan that had become so powerful that it was vying for equality with the Brahmins, witness the workings of the Almighty, that how the Raja called Parsuram destroyed them and eventually after Raja Janmejaya they were so wiped out that not even their name remained. So when

you see all these mighty Kingdoms and remember how God brings them to an end after a short period then why do you not comprehend that God has sent his hidden help [to defeat] this hundred-year-old Kingdom so that this community which regarded the children of God with contempt and addressed your brothers and brethren as black man and thus insulted and humiliated them. They are to be shown the prowess of the Almighty.

؛ Delhi Urdu Akhbar, 14 June

Collection 61, No. 396

17 August 1857

The note of the miracle-bearing one about the summoning of the bankers of Katra Neel was received. Your Lordship, the state of these disobedient bankers is this that whenever this servant goes to their houses to demand dues at that time they shut their doors and do not give any reply. They vanish away. This servant cannot enter their houses without the permission of the Exalted One. Therefore I pray that whatever is the command regarding the summoning and demanding dues of these bankers will be carried out. The supplication was made as it was only proper to do so.

May the Sun of the Kingdom and the Real always be resplendent,

Servant,

Syed Nazar Ali, *Thanadar*, Chandni Chowk

WOMEN

Collection 67, No. 7

5 June 1857

Your Exalted Majesty,

Yesterday, from eleven am till the afternoon a woman called Saaru *telin* (of the oilman caste), resident of Kauriya Pul took seven *Tilangas* with her and looted all the goods and properties at my house, worth one hundred Rupees. After the pleader made a report/complaint when the *Thanadar* of Kashmiri Gate visited my house with some *Tilangas* to make arrangements [for security, etc.] the woman said before the *Thanadar* that a lot of stolen and plundered goods are stored in this house. So he got my entire house dug up. My claim is against Saaru *telin* and after investigation I want my goods to be recovered from that woman and a sword and a *vilayati* (foreign) musket and some utensils which are my property and lying at the *Kotwali* should be returned to me. The *Kotwal* of the city has let that woman go and has asked me to present a warrant attesting my ownership.

Devoted,

Faiz Khan

Resident Gali Kunjna, Kashmiri Gate

Collection 62, No. 84

4 August 1857

Long live his Exalted Majesty,

My Lord. In the past this servant belonged to the Hindu community and then converted to Islam from Hinduism. The servant has lived long at Meerutt where the *Kafirs* have struck. Having accepted the Mohammedi path I came here to appear before your lordship and seek blessings. There was a woman named Hussaini *tawaif* (courtesan) with whom I got married. This servant and the woman came to Delhi. That woman then, after having appeared at Sarai Idgah, left me and befriended one named Khuda Bakhsh who is a spy and a gambler. She also took away all the valuables that this servant had brought from home.

Therefore I am filing this application before his Majesty and am hoping that the accused should be summoned and my valuables returned to me. If this cannot happen then at least my [legally] married wife should be returned and so [thus] I may receive justice from his Lord's bounty. The humble one has no recourse other than the Shining Lord to seek help. I made bold [to express myself] only out of necessity.

Servant,

Shaikh Islam, Resident Meerutt and Delhi

Collection 67, No. 9

19 June 1857

Name ; Shankar Nath, s/o of Sita Ram, *Qaum* ; Khattri, Resident of Koocha Brijnath, Occupation ; service, age 63 years.

Q. Complainant, what is your suit?

A. Nawab Amir Mirza got my daughter Kauyal Rai falsely arrested on the charge of being a spy of the *Firangis* (foreigners). I hope she will be released soon.

Q. Why has he got her arrested?

A. The answer is that he is friends with Afsar Khan and has access to Amir Mirza therefore he [managed to] get her arrested and Amir Mirza wants to marry that girl but that woman does not want to. Therefore he got her arrested through some Turk horsemen otherwise what does my daughter have to do with spying or *Firangis*.

LAWMAKERS

Apart from this the thing is that the water and air of our city of Delhi is such that the troops who display and can act with great daring outside and put the Kaffirs to sword and their deaths in one attack itself, the moment they drink the water of the city and do a round of Chandni Chowk and stroll about in the big and small Dariba and go around Jama Masjid and enjoy eating the qalaqand of Ghantawala and its laddus, they lose all urge and determination to fight and kill the enemy and become shorn of all strength and resolution. Experience as well as books of histories and biographies show us how this place [i.e. Delhi] has been prone to luxury and idleness and has ever ensnared [men] to indulgent supine-ness which is an impediment to governance, battle, warfare and pursuit of enemies. That is the reason

why wizened leaders of yore did not prefer to station their forces inside the city and the conquering Salateen (rulers) of the past did not favour this place of rest as an abode or place for living and the evidence of the daily goings on is the witness to the truth of this state and this opinion.

i Delhi Urdu Akhbar, 23 August

Collection 53

(Documents dated between 19 May and 10 August 1857)

22 June 1857

Respected *Kotwal Sahib*,

After the due respects the submission is that Fakhruddin *Jamadar* and Mirza Khan and Wazir Khan *Barqandazes*²¹ of the *Thana* were sent for their daily rounds as is the practice. Below the ramparts they noted some sacks of loot stacked by the wall and they challenged the owners. The owner argued back and unsheathed a sword and there was some jostling and raised voices when some *Tilangas*, posted at Lahori Gate came and hit Mirza Khan *Barqandaz* until he was bleeding and have kept the *Jamadar* and the *Barqandaz* hidden in their custody. Although I sent word many times but they do not listen and do not heed anybody. Therefore I am submitting the details because the *Tilangas* posted at that gate are Royal servants. If this goes on then it would be impossible to maintain order and discipline because the daily rounds are conducted to keep an eye on mischief and disorder. Whatever you command shall be obeyed.

Mirza Mohammed Khan, *Darogha*, Guzar Qasim Jaan

Collection 60, No. 253

1 July 1857

Commander-in-Chief to the *Kotwal*

An order has been proclaimed to the effect that without the order of the government and the presence of the informer no [forced] searches will be conducted at any respectable person's house. Yet, people of the army have been known to flout the order and act in contravention to it. It is incumbent upon you to stop them and to investigate the platoon these soldiers belong to. Let us know quickly and keep the soldiers at bay. Act firmly.

Collection 110, No. 294

[Undated]

To the *Kotwal* of the City,

It has been learnt that many residents of the city have muskets, guns and other weapons stored in their houses. You are therefore instructed to impound all the swords, guns, etc. wherever their existence is learnt about. If they hand it over freely then it is the best otherwise forcibly search their houses and seize the things mentioned and have it sent over. But be very careful during the search that except for swords, guns and bullets no harm should accrue to anybody's house. Nobody should misbehave with them or insult them. You

are made responsible for the good conduct, if any complaints are made on this score, you will be held accountable.

Collection 53

[Documents dated between 19 May and 10 August 1857]

Notice to the *Thanedar* of Kashmiri Darwaza

There was a note from trader Bahauddin stating that Bahauddin's shop as well as two houses of Prince Kamran Bahadur which fall in your area were searched without any basis and you even let it be stormed. Therefore it is being written to the *Thanedar* of Kashmiri Darwaza that until [someone's guilt] is proved you should desist from raiding or looting anybody's house. When and if you intend to raid somebody's house you should immediately inform the [*Kotwali*]. Until permission is granted by the *Kotwali* no raids should be conducted. If anybody complains to you [about anyone] then you should get him to swear under oath and keep him in the lock up. You will be acting against your interest if you act against [the rules]. In case of any doubt please contact the *Kotwali* right away.

SUBALTERNS

There is something else that needs attention which is causing a lot of damage to the people which is that the water-carriers have stopped filling water. Poor shurfas (gentility) are seen carrying water in pails on their shoulders and only then the necessary household tasks such as cooking, etc. can take place. The halalkhors have become haramkhors,²² many mohallas have not been able to earn for several days and if this situation continues then decay, deaths and disease will combine together to spoil the city's air and an epidemic will spread all over the city and even to areas adjacent and around.

; *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, 14 June

Collection 67, No. 152

[Undated]

My Lord, we servants belong to the potter caste and have four-five houses and our work consists of moulding pots and pans and we give these utensils away to the armed forces. Many of our men have run away. Now the *Kotwal*, through the *Thanadar* of Turkman Gate, has had us arrested and sends us away for government work and makes us do labour as coolies. We are thus faced with total ruin. If we continue to be conscripted as coolies we shall leave and the work of preparing utensils will suffer. We hope that your Lordship will issue an order and an order be handed to us so that the *Kotwal* or the *Thanadar* of Turkman Gate stop arresting us and sending us to the front.

Devoted,

- Kalka Chaudhry,
- Debi Prasad
- Bhola

- Jodha
(some more names)
Potter caste, Kali Masjid under Turkman Gate *thana*

Collection 111 c, No. 139

8 August 1857

The Valiant City *Kotwal*,

Immediately upon the receipt of this note please arrest as many water-carriers of the city as can be arrested and dispatch them to the gunpowder factory so that the saltpetre that is still left there is saved. Please regard the matter as urgent and obey the instructions promptly.

[Gloss ; Water-carriers were sent.]

Collection 67, No. 68

[Undated]

Name ; Kalicharan, s/o Baldev, *Qaum* ; carpenter, Resident Maandu, Occupation ; carpentry, age 40 years, literate

Name ; Moolchand, *Qaum* ; carpenter, Resident Farrukhabad, Occupation ; carpentry, age 30 years, literate

Q. Do you have a joint deposition or different?

A. Our deposition is the same.

Q. State the reason for your arrest.

A. Some three months ago we were engaged in repairing the bridge on the canal of the river Hindon. When the disturbances broke out we were in Arhsanth village, when the first battle took place at Arhsanth we left it and were making our way to the village when the *Risaldar* deployed at Ghaziuddin Nagar whose name we do not know sent Ramdin horseman to say that we were to appear before his Majesty the King. We left with the horseman and stayed at Ghaziuddinnagar on Tuesday. Some six days ago we arrived here on Wednesday morning and Ramdin horseman handed us here. We have no clue as to the reason for our arrest. As far as we know we have done nothing wrong.

Q. Which cavalry does Ramdin *sawar* belong to?

A. He is with the 2nd cavalry posted at Ghaziuddinnagar.

Q. What do you want?

A. We want to be set free.

[Order given that they be released.]

Collection 61, No. 352

12 August 1857

Mohammed Ihsanullah Khan, *Thanadar*, Turkman Gate, to the *Kotwal*. Sends *Chaudhris* of Shoemakers and Tailors.

After greetings and respects it is stated that as per your instructions the Head [of the clan

of] shoemakers and of tailors are being sent to you.

Mohammed Ihsanullah Khan,
Thanadar, Turkman Gate

Collection 61, Number 296

4 August 1857

After the submission of the deepest respects it is urged that your note regarding the summoning of the bakers and the confectioners was received. As for summoning them the situation is this that the said *Halwai* is a *banjara*²³ and is unwilling to send the stuff required without money^a

Whereas the treacherous English fraudulently proclaim their might and the strength of their government at whichever place they take over, city or village. They do everything in their power [propaganda] to advertise their power and to maintain people's fear of them. The moment they flee from the Ridge the petty Zamindars of Sonapat and Baghpat would eat them alive. Inshallah then not a single Gora (white man) will be able to reach even Merath or Panipat.

; *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, 12 August

CONCLUSION

The content of what we know about the *Ghadar* is a measure of what we are content to know about it. It is thus, mostly, a page of contents: a list of names, events and battles, sometimes local, sometimes national. Memory finds no place here, except as reified historical accretion, serviceable for a national movement or an anniversary. Like the *anqa*²⁴ of Urdu poetry, there but not there, everywhere yet never to be found, the discourse around the *Ghadar* reproduces, generation after generation, the stale binaries of local versus national, personal versus ideological, heroic versus cowardly, swan song versus harbinger. The more we use these markers, the more difficult it is to find them; the more these categories are resisted, the stronger their impress on the discussion.

Resistance ; why is that term entirely missing from the vocabulary surrounding the *Ghadar*? What about protest? In these documents alone there is so much protest and so much resistance ; residents against soldiers, policemen against orders from higher-ups, sepoys against officers, commoners against the administration, and ideologues against the spirit of Delhi. What about racism? Can we make sense of the hatred that everywhere brims over against the *firangis* without accounting for the humiliation and the insults that the black man had been facing from the white?

Without protest, resistance and racism, the collective bid for power that constituted the *Ghadar* remains *anqa*, and all we are left with is the rising of the black man against the white, as inexplicable and as stultifying as ever.

Author's Note

All these documents, and thousands besides, were generated during the *Ghadar* in Delhi. Even as the city was being bombarded, the paperwork continued apace. Without an institutionalised order, this massive correspondence could not have existed. The standardised form of the petitions also implies the profusion of *munshis*, a professional class of scribes, who drafted these letters; as also an equal number of carriers and messengers. While few documents specifically mention them, their invisibility cannot mask their ubiquity.

In a manner that is very familiar to contemporary Indians, we find the Delhi police being used as the strong arm of the state even as the fragile administrative authority is forced to acknowledge the power of public opinion. They are asked to commandeer labour and resources, to make forcible searches and arrests, but without offending anyone! The Princes, particularly Mirza Zaheeruddin alias Mirza Mughal, the Commander-in-Chief until he was replaced by Bakht Khan, belie the stereotype of effete-ness that has been haunting them (especially since Munshi Premchand's famous story *Shatrazaj ke Khilari*).²⁵

The firebrand editor of *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, Mohammed Baqar, was the father of the legendary Mohammed Husain Azad, the writer of *Ab-e Hayat*, one of the most formative works of modern Urdu. Azad later recalled how he escaped from Delhi clutching only the manuscript of his beloved Ustad Zauq, which he subsequently published. Baqar's case, however, is queered by a particular letter, preserved in an English translation in the Delhi Archives, addressed to William Hodson, where he makes suggestions about how to recapture the city. In other words, he could have been an English spy!

Acknowledgement

I thank William Dalrymple for allowing me to draw upon this research, made possible because of him.

All translations from Urdu, unless specified, are mine. The meanings of Urdu words are taken from J. T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English* (W.H. Allen & Co., 1884, London).

All Mutiny documents are from the National Archives of India, classified as Mutiny Papers. Serial numbers in this text refers to the specific collection where each document is located.

Delhi Urdu Akhbar was an independent weekly newspaper, one of the three newspapers to be published from Delhi during the Mutiny, and the only non-official one. Its editor was one of the strongest native ideologues of the Mutiny. Selected Mutiny issues (May-September 1857) are in the National Archives (Mutiny Papers, Collection No. 2).

NOTES

1. I have had the temerity to modify a couplet from Mir Taqi Mir: *Jahan se dekhiye yak shere-e shor-angez nikle hain* (You will find a turbulence-inciting couplet, wherever you look [in this collection])f. In *Diwan-e Mir*, (ed.) Maulvi Abdul Haq, Anjuman-Taraqqi-e Urdu, (Hind), 22nd edition, 2000, Delhi), p. 6.
2. The nomenclature of the events of 1857 remains a matter of contention. Mutiny, the term preferred by colonial rulers, underplays the significance of the wider civic revolt; war of independence, the label preferred by nationalists, seems anachronistic. The contemporaries usually used the terms *ghadar*, *fasad*, *balwa* and *shorish*. All considered, the word *Ghadar* subsumes the many different connotations of the event, and I have therefore chosen to stay with it.
3. Derogatory reference for Indian soldiers in general, following the large number of persons with the surname Pandey who were employed in the armies of the East India Company; and building upon the fact, perhaps, that Mangal Pandey was one of the first soldiers to rebel against the company. See Sir Henry Yule, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms*,

Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive (New edn. edited by William Crooke, B.A.; J. Murray, 1903, London), p. 667.

4. The quote is from Faiz Ahmed Faiz's famous lament for 1947, *Yeh dagh- dagh ujala, yeh shab guzeidah sehar^a f*
5. John Kaye. *History of the Sepoy War in India*, Vol. 3, Preface, vi (W.H. Allen & Co., 1877, London).
6. Brigadier-General John Nicholson, the ruthless commander of the Moveable Column that assaulted Delhi, was known for his inveterate hatred of the rebel sepoys as well as for his fierce piety. Major William Hodson, commander of Hodson's Horse, head of intelligence at Delhi, reportedly killed 49 natives with his own hands in one day; he played a leading role in the assault and capture of Delhi.
7. Every worthless fellow, puffed up with pride, perpetrates what he will^a The jewels of the city's fair-faced women^a fill the sacks of the vile, dishonoured thieves and pilferers^f. Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Dastanbui*, transl. Ralph Russell and Khurshid ul Islam. In (ed.) Ralph Russell, *The Oxford India Ghalib: Life, Letters and Ghazals* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 119.
8. See Homi Bhabha, 'By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in the Mid-Nineteenth Century'. In Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1990, New York/London), pp. 195-212.
9. See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Oxford, 1983), *passim*.
10. John Kaye, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 603-6. I am thankful to Shahid Amin for this insight.
11. *Rascal, malicious one*; the terms most commonly used for the crowds that are so universal during the *Ghadar*, everywhere.
12. John Kaye, op. cit., p. 606.
13. Cannabis.
14. Squash and brinjal, vegetables considered *infra dig* by the Delhi elites.
15. See *Delhi Urdu Akhbar*, 12 July, p. 1.
16. *Dastanbui* (transl. K. A. Faruqi, Delhi, 1970) pp. 33-34; cited in Pavan Verma, *Ghalib: The Man, The Times* (Viking/Penguin, 1988, Delhi), p. 147.
17. Generic name for the sepoys in Delhi. Originated from the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, from when the first batch of Indian sepoys recruited by the East India Company first wore English uniforms.
18. Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtyar Kaki, the patron saint of Delhi whose shrine at Mehrauli, located near the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah's summer palace, attracted frequent visits from the sovereign.
19. Vegetable sellers.
20. The word *qaum*, later used to refer, alternately, to community or nation, appears in these documents, unexceptionally, as a marker of ethnicity/caste and/or occupation, hence I have let it remain untranslated.
21. A foot soldier armed with a rifle, as opposed to a mounted, gun-bearing soldier who was called a *tafangchi*.
22. Legitimate earning/permissibles are called *halal* and illegitimate ones *haram*. The phrase here means roughly that the honest have become corrupt, and vice versa.
23. A caste who are carriers of grain, salt, & c. (syn. *banjara*), an individual of that caste; a company of people of this caste (as on its march, or at its encampment). See Platts, op. cit., p. 963.
24. *Anqa* (fem. of *anaq*, 'long-necked'; rt. 'to be long in the neck'), s.m. A fabulous bird, the phoenix; a rare avis (*simurg*), adj. Scarce, rare, hard to get or find; wonderful, curious; *anqa hona*, to be rare & c. (e.g., is *zamane mein rozgar anqa hai*, proverb, meaning it is difficult to find employment in this age). See Platts, op. cit., p. 766.
25. The famous Urdu/Hindi writer Munshi Premchand's story *The Chess Players*, which narrates how two Nawabs of Lucknow remain obsessed with their games of chess even as the city is annexed during the Mutiny.

The Silent Memorial: Life of the Mutiny in Orchha's Lakshmi Temple

RAHAAB ALLANA



Jhansi, 1857-58

As the sun beat against their heavy armour, the 8th Hussars (European Mercenary Cavalry) charged rebel forces on the grounds near Gwalior in June 1858. These so-called dissenters were the last of the central Indian leaders who commanded loyalty from the sepoys. Their forceful encounter with the British lasted several hours, even as their battle cry, *Deen ki Jai* (Victory to Faith)! resonated with the impassioned zeal of resistance. With them, riding on a chestnut-brown steed and bearing a sword drawn swiftly from the scabbard, was the *Rani* of Jhansi. To her, this battle meant certain death. However, for a warrior like the *Rani*, to be slain in the field against monumental odds amounted to victory.

The first episode of the siege of Jhansi by British troops, almost a year before the *Rani*'s tortuous death, is starkly portrayed in the Lakshmi Temple of Orchha; a state that remained for the most part allied to the colonial forces throughout the violent course of the Mutiny. Today, the relative tranquility of Orchha is disturbed only by tourist vans and vendors, oblivious to its history, the years when its colossal forts became synonymous with political intrigue. The close proximity to Jhansi also induced the British to station their forces near the Orchha Gate that led to it from Jhansi Fort. In the aftermath of the Mutiny, with the leaders killed and the rebel voices silenced, local artisans chose the inner sanctum of the Lakshmi temple as a site for the depiction of their version of the turbulence, as a mark of their reverential allegiance to the warrior queen.

Orchha and Jhansi

Southwest of the river Yamuna, Jhansi sits on a vast triangular plateau. Its history is strongly

influenced by its physical features. Streams water the rugged basalt hills and fertile valleys during the treacherous summer months. The fort itself stands upon a hill of solid granite, each bastion 16-20 feet thick. The steep incline of the rock ably protects the west, and three flanking towers shield the east face that once overlooked large tanks, picturesque palaces, numerous gardens and temples.¹

Jhansi once constituted the kingdom of the Chandela Rajputs who claimed descent from the Gaharwar Rajas of Benares. Similarly the Bundelas, also Rajputs, created another foothold in the region comprising Kalinjar, Kalpi and Mahoni. Raja Malkhan first founded Orchha, followed by his son, Rudra Pratap. The latter's ascendancy was marked by the construction of the Raja Mahal; most Bundelas trace their lineage from him. He was later succeeded by Bharti Chand in 1531; the latter by Madhukar Shah in 1554. Eventually, in 1577 this small sector of principalities bowed to the imperial forces of Delhi. And so, on Akbar's instructions in 1592, Madhukar's son Ram Shah succeeded him as heir apparent.²

Without the authority or compulsion to resist external pressure, Ram Shah eventually succumbed to the forces of the Bundela chief Bir Singh Deo. In 1602, Bir Singh risked his own life by assassinating Abul Fazl, chief chronicler of Akbar, on his return to Delhi from the Deccan. Abul Fazl never openly supported Prince Salim (Akbar's elder son, better known to history as Jehangir), and was murdered at his behest. Accordingly, when Jehangir assumed power, Bir Singh easily acquired Orchha between 1605 and 1627, one of the smaller districts in the Malwa region.³ After Bir Singh's demise, in their tireless squabble for power, in 1627 the Bundelas resisted the authority of Jehangir's son, the Emperor Shah Jahan. Champat Rai of Mahoba thwarted Mughal attempts at conquest for a period of time by attacking convoys and garrisons. In their own complex pitch for dominion, the Mughals too fought amongst themselves for Delhi. As allied rulers, the Bundelas directed their loyalties toward the emperor's eldest son Dara Shukoh, an able poet and philosopher, but those of Mahoba under Champat Rai opted for the stern military prowess displayed by Dara's younger brother Aurangzeb. However, Rao Shri Durjan Singh (Chhattarsal) in the Malwa region took a stand against Aurangzeb. Despite a series of raids by the pillaging Mughal armies, he managed to sustain Charkhari, Bijawar, Panna and Orchha as independent principalities. A peace was drafted in 1640, proclaiming the independence of Orchha state.

Consequently, Orchha evolved with its own style of art and aesthetics that drew sustenance from the Rajput architecture that dominated surrounding states such as Gwalior. Though there was a minor spurt of creative impetus prior to Bir Singh Deo, none managed to develop a lasting aesthetic relationship between architecture and landscape. In his attempt to fortify the city, its centre and to distinguish the royal from the urban, Bir Singh had supported the construction of the Jehangir Mahal, named thus in honour of his patron. It was one of the first architectural ventures with *garh* palaces or private royal residences that accommodated both *zenana* and *mardana* (women's and men's segregated living spaces).⁴ On the ground level, a rectangular courtyard afforded the construction of several storeys by the placement of domed pillars in the four corners. This base plan continued on

to the subsequent floors. The symmetry of form, and the repetition of spaces from level to level, signified core aspects of this ground plan. These levels became more and more complex as one visually scaled the fort, eventually yielding a dramatic view of interactions between protruding *jharokhas* (balconies with domed or vaulted roofs).

Bir Singh also built Phoolbagh, a garden; the Lakshminarayan Temple, dedicated primarily to Krishna; a *hamam* (public bathing space) and a *naubat khana*, a ceremonial drum house used for musical recitals. With his penchant for large, well-garrisoned buildings, he was also responsible for the construction of Jhansi Fort in 1613, on a hill then named Bangra. Therefore both Orchha and Jhansi were territorially linked by virtue of lying within the Bundelkhand region, and aesthetically matched, being patronised by the same king. It is thus substantive to say that their cross-referential architecture and art commences in the early 17th century, almost 250 years before the actual breach by the imperial forces.

Orchha sealed an alliance with the British in 1812, during the reign of Vikramajeet Singh (1787-1817). During the pre- and post-Mutiny years, Orchha was ruled by Begum and Sujan Singh. During the Mutiny years, the town remained concealed behind the picturesque veil of *chattris*, without any clear evidence of defiance or support for the *Rani* from the ruling family. The only readily available trace of resistance perhaps is the collection of paintings discussed in this essay, drawn in the traditional Bundelkhand style, distinctive of Central Indian manner.

The *Rani* as Rebel

Like most states in Northern India, Jhansi too bore the wrath of the East India Company during the colonial period. Earlier, the adopted son of the *Peshwa* was made to abdicate in lieu of his uncle under the Doctrine of Lapse, conceived by the Governor General Lord Dalhousie as a means to acquire territory. A similar series of annexations persisted till 1853, which was marked by the Jhansi *Raja*'s death. He left Lakshmbai, his 18-year-old wife, to command the administration and military forces.

Of her disposition, Dalhousie noted that she united the martial spirit of the Maratha soldier and the subtlety of the Deccan Brahmin.⁵

Colonel Lowe, a member of Central Indian Military Council at the time, pointed out, The native rulers of Jhansi were never sovereigns, they were only subjects of a sovereign, first of the *Peshwa* and latterly of the Company, and the Government now had full rights to annex the lands of Jhansi to the British administration⁶. A pension of £6000 was offered to the *Rani*, which she initially refused but later accepted. She was also asked to pay the debts of her late husband using this amount. The *Rani* maintained communication with Major Erskine, commissioner of the Sagar and Nerbudda territories, even after the outbreak of the Mutiny in Meerut, pledging the loyalty of her subjects to the Company. However, terrifying actions soon ensued. The rebels entered the city walls and massacred 58 resident British citizens. The only survivors of this gruesome episode were Mrs Mutlow, a Eurasian, and her young son, who were mistaken for Indians. Towards the end of January, the *Rani* sent another envoy to Erskine to certify her non-involvement with these events. In this letter she avowed

her abiding allegiance, but asserted that if she were treated kindly, she would not oppose the British, else she would fight till the end on account of being considered an outcaste by her family.⁷

Jhansi, now a rebel state, was marked for conquest. Lakshmibai's sincere commitment to British authority waned after her meeting with another mutineer, *Raja* Mardan Singh of Banpur. She wrote a letter to Major Hamilton (the Governor General's agent for Central India) on 1 January 1858, reiterating her strained circumstances. But she had already been deemed a dissenter, also owing to subsequent clashes with Orchha and nearby Datia. However, she was by no measure considered a weak adversary. In the wake of this event, Major-General Hugh Rose, one of the most decorated officers in the colonial army, was commissioned to address the Central Indian situation. In a letter to his commanding officer, Rose concurred the *Rani*'s impeccable stature and charisma when he wrote, "her generosity to her subordinates was unbounded. These qualities combined with her rank, rendered her the most dangerous of all the rebel rulers"⁸.

The Siege

An elaborate plan devised by Sir Colin Campbell in Calcutta had begun to be implemented to rid India of its rogue elements. The Bombay Column, also called the Central India (CI) Force, the Rajputana Field Force and Madras Field Force (Sagar and Nerbudda Field Force) were raised to curb the revolt. Officers appointed by the Commander-in-Chief included Hugh Rose for the CI force and generals Whitlock and Roberts for the Madras and Rajputana columns.

Rose had assumed command in December 1857, six months after the mutiny in Meerut.⁹ He entered the British service as an ensign in the 93rd Southerland Highlanders. After service in Ireland, he became Lieutenant Colonel and Deputy Adjutant General to Omar Pasha's brigade in Syria. In 1851, Lord Palmerston appointed him Secretary to the Embassy of Constantinople. The same year he was promoted to Brevet Colonel. Subsequently, when Russia drifted into war with France and England, he was appointed Queen's Commissioner at the headquarters of the French army. On 19 September 1857, the Duke of Cambridge gave Rose direct orders to take command of the Poona division of the Bombay army. Once his position was stable, Lord Canning, Governor General of India, entrusted Rose with the task of leading the Central Indian forces.

At 7 am on 21 March 1858, the day Colin Campbell captured Lucknow, Rose arrived at the gates of Jhansi. The massive fort before him sat atop a granite hill. The steepness of the rock protected its west face, and three flanking bastions sheltered the east. Stretching to the north and east of the city, to the right of the British encampment, were smaller hills leading to Orchha and the fortress of Kalpi. After consideration, Rose decided to launch his initial assault from the south, relatively unhindered by built structures. He then selected a rocky knoll adjoining Orchha gate for the breaching battery.

The following day, the Madras and Bombay sappers took charge of two 18-pounders and 8-inch howitzers. In addition, two 8-inch mortars were ordered as the 24th Native



Infantry initiated gunfire, further intensified by the arrival of the 1st Brigade the following day. All guns resumed firing on the morning of 26 March. Crucial battlements of the mutineers, such as the White Turret and the Black and Tree Towers, were reduced to rubble. However, eight days and nights of incessant bombardment had not yet deterred the rebel Bengal Artillery from resuming their lost positions on the south side.

The *mamelon* or raised bastion whose five guns protected the town's southern wall was gradually destroyed by the British forces. What is known in military reports and history books as the Battle of Betwa began on 1 April, with the British army directed against the *Rani*'s ally Tantia Tope of the Peshwa's court, who had been involved in fighting alongside the mutineers in Kanpur and had retreated south when the city was reoccupied by the British. Tantia came to the *Rani*'s rescue, but he was swiftly defeated and the CI troops continued their concentrated assault on the fort. The *Rani*, in an impressive show of gallantry, charged against the field marshals with 1500 Afghan followers. However, by nightfall most of the town was in British hands. The south picket was removed, to lure the *Rani* from the fort. After nightfall, wearing a breastplate, a sword and two revolvers, she (along with 300 of her Afghan guards and 25 troopers) managed an incredible escape from the reach of the 14th Light Dragoons. In the urgency and confusion at night, her father Moropant Tambe¹⁰ was separated from her troops. He was captured by the British the following day, and hanged in the same park that had earlier witnessed the massacre of British residents by the rebels.

The Final Clash

By 15 April, all of Jhansi surrendered to Company control but Kalpi, the well-fortified arsenal full of warlike stores¹¹, remained unattended. Kalpi stood on a high bald rock rising from the Yamuna and commanded the road from Jhansi to Kanpur. Dangerous rocky ravines led to it, each fraught with the lethal possibility of ambush. Rao *Sahib*, a Maratha general and the adopted nephew of Nana *Sahib*, Tantia's mentor and friend who had fought alongside him in the north, had chosen this terrain for the final stand. However, by 24 May the British army had overrun this safe haven.

On 26 May, the *Rani* and Rao *Sahib* fled to Gwalpur to rendezvous with Tantia and an unexpected supporter, the Nawab of Banda. Desperation led them to seek refuge and aid from the pro-British ruler of Gwalior, *Maharaja* Scindia. On 28 May, they crossed the Sind River and entered his state. There was a moment of indecision on the *Maharaja*'s part, but he eventually agreed to support their efforts. This news travelled quickly to Rose, who immediately marched the troops to Gwalior. Within two weeks, the CI forces assembled within four miles of Gwalior. According to news reports in the *Times*, the battle plans of the rebels were affected mainly under the direction and personal supervision of the *Rani*, who clad in military attire attended by a picket and well-armed escorts, was constantly in saddle¹². Her main line of defence stretched along the base of the hills that separated Gwalior from Kotah-ki-Sarai, the site where she would be mortally wounded.

The final standoff took place on the plains between Gwalior and Morar, swarming with

the forces of Tantia Tope. Here General Rose, accompanied by Brigadier Smith, brigade commander of the Malwa division, and Major Orr, began to coax the mutineers into open battle. On 17 June, a devastating attack was launched by the 8th Hussars. Led by Captain Foster, Lieutenant Morris and Captain Heneage, they charged through the narrow pass that led to the Gwalior plains. As they approached the fortress, the *Rani* charged with her troops. Surrounded by the enemy, she was wounded by bullets and eventually unhorsed by a sabre thrust. There are conflicting testimonies from both sides regarding her death; the generally accepted account states that she waited bleeding by the road, and upon seeing her assailant shot at him, but missed; he then ran his sword through her; in some versions he empties his carbine into her. Since she was disguised as a common *sawar* (cavalry soldier) in a red jacket, trousers and white *pugdee* (turban), the trooper never realised her true identity. Lakshmibai was hastily cremated under a mango tree in Gwalior. She was 22 years old.

After she fell, so did Gwalior, on 18 June 1858.

The British reaction comprised mixed sentiments of satisfaction and exultation. Though Colonel Lowe admitted Lakshmibai was the rebel's most determined, spirited and influential head^{f13}, Lieutenant-Colonel Bingham, who had helped with General Henry Havelock's epic rescue and relief operation of besieged Lucknow, believed that the British retaliation had been too slow, and the penalties too lenient in the light of the mutineers' sadism in Jhansi and Kanpur. The momentum of the Mutiny gradually diminished and the rebels either surrendered, or were suppressed, exiled or killed. Tantia Tope was captured and hanged on 18 April the following year. Rao *Sahib* managed to evade the British until 1862. He was subsequently charged under British law of modified rebellion, found guilty and hanged in Satichaura Ghat, the scene of the slaughter of British women and children in Kanpur. The British confiscated the possessions of Damodar Rao, the *Rani's* adopted son, and also revoked the sum of Rs 600,000 earlier stipulated as payable to him after his father's death. He was given an allowance of Rs 150, which was later raised to Rs 200.

A Memorial to Mutiny: Paintings in the Lakshmi Temple

From a distance, the Lakshmi temple stands in staccato poise like a memorial with its central tower piercing the sky. The temple was built in 1622 by Bir Singh and renovated in 1793 by Prithvi Singh. Due west of the Jehangir Mahal, abounding with playful motifs, it sits within a square plan but appears triangular, given that the entrance rests at the intersection of two planes. An eastern opening allows the first rays of the sun to illuminate its sanctum. Here unbaked stone, faintly coated with lime plaster, marble and seashell powder on the inner walls, reveals the oldest surviving paintings in the temple.

The most unusual renderings among these all relate to the Mutiny. They are placed among mythic imagery that draws upon the *Ramayana*, *Shrimad Bhagwat*, the *Puranas*, scenes from the lives of Krishna and Vishnu, Tulsidas' *Ramcharit Manas*, *nayakas-nayikas* (lit. heroes-heroines, stylised lovers enacting romantic tropes), *Ragas-Raginis* (personifications of modes of classical music); they also include events from the royal court of Bir Singh Deo. This artistic infusion of mythology with reality portends a means of

immortalising the memory of mortal rulers, and alternately, placing sanctified/deified individuals within the realm of the living. Though the paintings flow along a horizontal axis, they do not follow chronological schemes. Often, episodes are broken into two or three sections, appended to the depiction of scenes from myth.

In terms of style, miniature paintings from Central India are broadly categorised into the Malwa (Mandu, Narsinghad), Raghogarh and Bundelkhand region; this last category inscribes Orchha and Datia. In conjunction, the Deccani school of miniature painting was highly developed in Hyderabad, and the Pahari painting style in Kangra, Basohli and Kullu, to mention a few.¹⁴ The Lakshmi temple in Orchha evidently derives potency and inspiration from these, as niches along the entrance corridor reveal images of courtship, followed by religious narratives focusing on Rama and Sita at the intersection of two corridors. Renditions of the celestial couple also resonate with themes from Ragamala paintings, as seen in the figures of estranged lovers who embody the ambience generated by the notes of *Todi Ragini*. The melancholic lure of *varsha* (monsoon) entices peacocks to display their plumes in full splendour, while motifs of amorous intent, like the swing, allow the viewers to imagine catharsis. The ceilings of several corridors display iron rings, possibly for swings, transforming the space into a pleasure pavilion even while it functions as a gallery.

Apart from the painted ceilings, the concave slant of the domes also abounds with resplendent imagery. Tracing the breadth of the pillars, rectangular frames envelop a wide range of couples. Lovers seek solace from Shiva, while the turbulent Ganga perennially flows from a lock of his matted hair. In another panel, a fragment of historical truth is expressed through the image of British officials drinking wine. Here we see the English drawn in the traditional Bundelkhand manner, expressed in two dimensions. The eastern corridor lies to the right of the entrance porch, and is the last if approached by clockwise circumambulation. The images of the Mutiny are to be found here. Their style closely resembles that of devotional narratives, though the primary content is that of English-native military alliance and the siege of Jhansi Fort. Entering, one begins viewing the sequence from the far end of the left wall. Illustrations of the alliances between British officers and Indian officials perhaps bear testimony to the treaty of 1812 forged with the Bundelas. In these paintings, the British encampment is clearly depicted, consisting of tents; within, officials celebrate with liquor, a *natch* (dance by courtesans) and other *nawabi* (elite leisure) activities. The adoption of *desi* (indigenous) mannerisms, tastes and, at times, wives, was common among the British as they sought to carry the Mughal lineage of power and culture to its destined evolutionary pinnacle. In this section, there are also depictions of various native professions that several European painters and photographers also made the subject of their work. Noticeable are *bhishtis* (water-carriers), fruit sellers and grooms, who feed horses in the presence of their *gora* (white) masters.

From here, we are led to scenes of the marching infantry and cavalry, having beaten to quarters; taken strategic positions to launch an attack, as it were, in preparation for battle. The howitzers are lined up and the troops begin to stride towards the palace. The soldiers hold bayonets as well as smaller matchlock handguns. Foot soldiers lead the

charge, firing at what might in fact be the south wall of Jhansi fort. The mutineers retaliate with cannon fire and arrows. There are also associations with the white turret that General Rose destroyed, represented by white cannons pointed towards the British army. However, the formidable force of the Raj outweighs the rebel one. The outer wall of the fort is being fired upon, but the enclosure within the moat is still undamaged. The king, presumably the *Rani's* father, confers with his minister. The *Rani* herself is in a tower, facing away from the viewer, subdued, almost in a state of torpor.

A Resistant Figure

At a more general, cultural level, a particular artistic reciprocity between India and the English is manifested in Company paintings by Indian artists, who depicted the possessions, family members and even the sprawling estates of their colonial patrons. A portrayal of the Mutiny, as well as of British army officials, on the walls of the temple suggests that British presence had been accepted into and absorbed by the local population. They were paradoxically seen as foreigners but also as clients; an imperial force, but one that could strategically go native with ease, for they were skilled players within a complex and regulated system of bilateral negotiations. Sensitive to this dialectic, the Lakshmi temple artists were able to develop their own hermeneutic of the visible. In addition, the technique of watercolour, the aesthetic parameters of realism, and the concentration on real people as primary subjects broke sharply with the prevailing stylistic conventions. They enabled the artists to respond afresh to a situation they together appropriated as righteous, compelling and, perhaps most importantly, contemporary.

The figures, drawn from life, and the contextual accuracy of the ground in terms of objects and events, suggest an astute eye and a commitment to detail. However, there seems to be no positive motivation or vigour, but rather a drift into complacency and introspection, on the part of the depicted *Rani*. Several moments pass as though she were reconciled to the misfortune of the Jhansi rulers, subsequently eliminated or isolated. And so, the paintings manage to suspend the act of warfare between resolutions. Lakshmibai, seated in a pavilion in the *zenana*, becomes an icon of subjugation, resigned and unwilling to face the English army, as indeed she was.

This sensitivity completely changes post-1947, when the iconic focus shifts from latent to manifest opposition. In a 1980s portrait of the *Rani* that hangs in the foyer of the Jhansi railway station, she is astride her horse, on the open battlefield. Here she is drawn closer to scale, perhaps during her last hours. The style is more European, as she darts across the picture plane, fighting the Hussars.

Thus we find that within the temple, she sits with humility in the sacrosanct realm of the gods, respectful of their presence; outside it, she stands as a symbol of national pride and active defiance.

The different spaces demand differing treatments. In the temple, the eye leaps from detail to detail, absorbing the historical panorama while inferring nuances of the *Rani's* particular circumstances. She becomes a figure in crisis but also a bearer of epiphany.

Juxtaposed with avatars, the *Rani* signifies a manifestation of survival and continuity, even optimism. Though today she is looked upon as a martyr, killed in historical time, when she is resurrected in the temple sanctum she becomes timeless. The walls of the temple seem to indicate that while the colonial and the native may share a segment of the historical stage in works of art, yet a shared stature is impossible ; a fact which should be exhibited for public scrutiny. Though art has often been put to use with a nationalistic agenda, it is often the popular that becomes a more effective tool to address aspects of difference and change. The Orchha artists carefully include aspects of the traditional (in this case, the Pahari style) as well as the urbanised aspects of the folk (Company style). Often, these artistic impulses are affected by social change, and the use of artistic wit (in the rendering of drinking scenes, for instance) allows one to construe a hybrid that is potentially iconoclastic. As a result, the depiction of the *Rani* and the British military interspersed with numerous gods and symbolic figures creates degrees and modes of ideal alienation, allowing the characters and their situations to transgress time, and transcend the conventional limits of history and mythology.

The late writer and cultural critic Susan Sontag mentions that a society becomes modern when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images¹⁵. Even though such manners existed long before the advent of modernity, the way in which images are perceived today enables them to rise beyond the fetters of their own context and signify the development of an identity. With particular regard to the Mutiny images, new entities then become (re)configured, most plausibly those of a nation , in addition to, and in keeping with, older ways of representing gods and goddesses. And so, based on Sontag's assumption, I would then suggest that this society became modern when it consumed images belonging to a space that drew Indians together as a nation. In addition, the painting of such episodes allowed the gods to travel outside the domain of the temple and join the active lives of the people. The paintings in the Lakshmi temple then, quite ingeniously, intertwine notions of cult or a personal religious encounter on the one hand and exhibition or social participation on the other. The figures break with generic conventions; the motifs allow for re-inflection, the aesthetic paradigm allows for its formal deconstruction. The narrative strategy is radicalised and transfigured through the symbolic/mythic mode being closely associated, and even interchangeable, with (in this case) human action.

According to the historian Sumati Ramaswamy, the index or meeting point of corporeal encounters with art forms produces bodyscapes^f, a term applied to underscore the deployment of the human, more so the female, with the territorial landscape of a nation.¹⁶ The beholder looks upon this image not with a sense of disconnect from a historical abstraction, but rather with the sense that it is worth sacrificing one's life for this dynamic entity. In the mind of the viewer, the figure of the *Rani* traverses the liminal terrain between death and regeneration, eager to negotiate the terms of war and order. Her life that is historically true now becomes emblematic. And given the conditions of her martyrdom, she becomes even more of a tragic sign, aggressively transformed within the ethos of nationalism into a symbol of relentless energy and dignity.

Is it then possible to suggest that the series of paintings in Orchha are representative of visual practices that distinguish an Indian modern? In doing so, do they still have the power to transform and mobilise the self and community, as the power to make visible also implies the ability to exercise a certain amount of control? No image is permanently bounded or an end in itself; an image is always porous, always engaging and always available for strategic appropriation. However, in *this* pledge for resolution, the unyielding figure of the *Rani* of Jhansi will always remain a compelling figment of our imagination.

NOTES

1. Major-General Hugh Rose, commanding the CI field force, wrote in a letter dated 30 April 1858: Outside the walls, the city is girt with wood except some parts of the south and east fronts^a Temples with their gardens; one the Jokun Bagh, the scene of the massacre of a lamented countrymen; and two rocky ridges, the east-most called Kapoo Tekri, both important positions, facing and threatening the south face of the city wall and Fortf. See (ed.) George W. Forrest, *The Indian Mutiny: Selections from the Letters, Dispatches and Other State Papers, Preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India, 1857-58*, Vol. IV (Reprint: Asian Education Services, 2001, New Delhi), p. 41.
2. A.P. Singh. *Monuments of Orchha* (Agam Kala Prakashan, 1991), pp. 11-20.
3. A.H. Begley. *Handbook on Rajputs* (Reprint: Asian Educational Services, 1986, New Delhi), p. 56.
4. G.H.R. Tillotson. *The Rajput Palaces: The Development of an Architectural Style, 1450-1750* (Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 73.
5. Christopher Hibbert. *The Great Mutiny: India 1857* (Penguin Books, 1978, London), p. 378.
6. This statement was probably written after the massacre in Jhansi, as Colonel Lowe was very critical of the Doctrine of Lapse. He vehemently objected to Dalhousie's annexation of Nagpur: What crime did the Raja commit that his country should be seized by the Company^a the Indian government did not limit the succession of heirs to the body alone^a See Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny* (Penguin UK, 2002), p. 7.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
8. George W. Forrest, op. cit., p. 81.
9. Saul David, op. cit., p. 356.
10. The Maharaja of Jhansi served for many years as chief advisor to the *Peshwa* Baji Rao II, younger brother of Chamanji. Upon the latter's death, Moropant joined the *Peshwa*'s court at Bithur.
11. George W. Forrest, op. cit., p. 83.
12. Saul David, op. cit., p. 370.
13. George W. Forrest, op. cit., p. 139.
14. Krishna Chaitanya. *History of Indian Painting: Pahari Style* (Abhinav Publications, 1991) pp. 90-101.
15. Susan Sontag. *On Photography* (Dell, 1977, New York), p. 153.
16. Sumati Ramaswamy (ed.). *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India* (Sage Publications, 2003), xxii.

Buccaneers, Pirates and Privateers

VIJAYALAKSHMI BALAKRISHNAN

Learning to Fish: The Net and the Sea

Cyberspace governance is going through a period of transition. Until the last decade, the user community saw the World Wide Web as free space, pure, pristine, where ideas and individuals rather than interest groups and institutions had primacy in decision-making. This has changed over the last ten years. Today, an individual's access to information on the Internet is fenced off and restricted, by both State and market.

This fencing off has been so gradual, and the methodologies used so sophisticated, that activists attempting to keep electronic space free have been forced onto the back foot, remaining primarily reactive in their advocacy. Nation states and market players from the old economy have strategically focused on defining the architecture of the internet, to ensure that in the new economy their relevance remains as high.

In their search for public arguments to persuade people and develop adequate groundswell, freedom activists have limited their challenge to the rules and regulations within the domain of what is now international law. The confrontations and challenges have improved access to information for end-users through innovative legal solutions; but the resistance has been unable to question the core understanding of the internet as another marketing channel for the players of the old economy.

One reason for this has been the limited range of learning opportunities. Cyber-activists and proponents have emerged from the wider anti-globalisation struggles; memories and experiences have remained linked to resistance around land and related notions of property; ideas of power struggles have been learned through engagement with and challenges to this facet of markets. And yet, the entire lexicon of the internet is the legacy of human engagement with the sea.

- There are, at the very least, four levels of similarities between the internet and the sea:
- > Both use similar terminologies: surf, navigate, trawl, sea spider.
 - > Neither has geographic boundaries, and are thus difficult to control by the nation-state system.
 - > For the market, both the sea and the Internet offer opportunities for growth as well as pose challenges of control.
 - > Mechanisms that earlier controlled sea trade, like mechanisms that control the internet today, have the ability to reduce distance and redefine notions of time and space; and thus redefine power relationships. In the case of the sea, the big breakthrough came in the mid-15th century.

When the domains of the sea and of cyberspace are compared, the basic realities, character and flavour of the historical maritime strategies of nation states and the contemporary cyber-business strategies of for-profit corporations turns out to be closer and more constant than one might imagine.

Sailing, down the Ages

In *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), economist Adam Smith has argued that the discovery of America and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind.

The dramatic language, when read with the benefit of hindsight, may suggest an overstatement, but it is difficult even today not to appreciate the critical role these two events that took place in quick succession have had in shifting the balance of power in the world economy.

Through much of history, contact between Asia and Europe was hyphenated, being mediated through engagement with Arabia. Despite having been a seafaring people all through history, the Europeans had no involvement in the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean, which was entirely in the hands of Asians and Arabs. All of this began to change in the 16th century, when the Iberians began serious maritime exploration, aided by the compass and changes in shipping technology.

By the beginning of the 17th century, Dutch and British oceanic merchant shipping had become the main connection between Asian and European markets. Much of the maritime trade between different parts of Asia was also taken over by European ships. How did the Europeans, in a matter of three generations, shift from being non-players to the dominant actors in Indian Ocean trade?

It is interesting to think of the epoch of maritime discovery as a previous chapter in the history of what is considered globalisation today. Then too, the impulses that knit large distances together did not originate in only one location (the west) and did not flow only in one direction (towards the east). There were significant countercurrents that made the history of global contact a far more complex matter than we are accustomed to believe.

Moment I: Gaining Control of the Oceans

Around 1660, the *Faujdar* of Balasore ; in present-day Orissa ; was approached by the King of the Maldives to intercede with the Emperor Aurangzeb, so as to impose a ban on Dutch and English ships. Being a realist, the *Faujdar* justified the situation thus: by stating that the Emperor was master only of the land and not of the sea. In that statement lay the ruins of the Mughal empire and the seeds of the rise of the new imperium. Over the next half-century, that power shift would be well cemented.

One of the key differentials between the three European powers ; the Dutch, the Portuguese and the English ; who entered Asia to trade was in their treatment of privateers. The Portuguese strongly discouraged it; the Dutch pragmatically acknowledged and accepted that privateers would continue to function, given the situation in Asia. Only the English converted the reality of privateers into an arm of colonial expansion strategy.

Pirates, through history, have had an ambiguous relationship with authority. While both pirates and privateers had profit in mind, the key difference is the relationship to a nation-state, for the privateer was also seen as an extended arm of the state. Thus the privateer usually functioned with the support of a letter or marquee, which provided a list of countries whose ships could not be attacked. However, there was little support for privateers who were captured. In most cases, the hostile country would treat the privateer as a pirate, charge and execute him. And in most countries, a key distinction was made between a merchant and privateer, in that the privateer was not paid by the nation or company but earned from the treasures on board ships or properties that were attacked.

England was one of the few countries that went further in its strategic utilisation of privateers to fulfil expansion ambitions. Thus, during war, England commissioned privateers to seek out and attack the ships of hostile nations; sailing on the account , i.e., they would loot, pillage, and plunder England's enemies for King and Country . For their efforts, the captain and crew would receive a portion of the plunder, between 20 and 50%, with the rest going to the Crown. In return, the captain and crew had safe harbour and were protected by England. It was not just during times of war, that the State in England and privateers worked together. Through law and policy measures, the State worked closely with privateers, advancing their interest as also its own.

The Navigation Acts controlled the movement of ships throughout the emerging empire. They had three key provisions.

First, defining who could trade: Trade with colonies could only be conducted on English or colonial ships.

Second, clearly outlining what could be traded and with whom: Certain key raw materials, tobacco, sugar and indigo were exclusively meant for trade within the empire.

Third, mapping the trading route that would need to be followed: Stipulating that all goods meant for sale outside the Empire would have to be routed through England.

Since trade outside the English colonies primarily meant the sale of goods to continental Europe, the Acts effectively transformed England and English ports into a gateway to Europe and established Britain as the preeminent commercial and shipping

power. Between 1660, when the first Navigation Act was implemented, and 1700, a few years after the last reworking of this legislation, British exports grew by 50%; at least half that increase in profits came from the re-export of colonial imports to Europe, underlining the importance of Europe as a commercial market destination. Crucially, the Navigation Acts made no distinction between the goods brought in through private trade, of individuals and that of the official monopoly holder.

By the 17th century, however, there was growing ambiguity about the status of pirates and privateers. Many privateers reneged on their commitment to the state, attacking for profit rather than as a political duty, just as there were some pirates who, in times of crisis, were willing to accept a relationship with the state, thus prioritising politics over profit. Other countries attempted to get England to rein in its privateers, but this did not happen until well into the 17th century. And in 1856, at the Congress on Maritime Law in Paris, privateering was banned. The first article of the treaty signed in Paris is categorical: *Privateering is, and remains, abolished...f*

By abolishing privateering, the European states were primarily delinking profit from justice. This had as much, if not more, to do with their greater sense of control over the seas and the colonies, and the perceived threat from privateers, now operating as corporations global economic players, as it had to do with any ethical considerations.

However, while the Congress of 1856 managed to end privateering, thus separating state and market expansion activities, piracy on the seas continued to flourish, challenging both state and market expansion.

All of this is similar to contemporary activity within cyberspace. Tacit support is provided for creative innovations that will push technology and the overall boundaries of the economic space. However, this support is conditional: as with privateers in the past, it is available until the status quo of existing corporate structures is threatened.

Moment II: The Past in the Present

In her book *Law and Internet Cultures*, Kathryn Bowrey examines copyright litigation by content owners against successive generations of peer-to-peer networks, such as Napster, Kazaa and Grokster.¹ Instead of digital piracy, she suggests, a different way of framing the issue: Perhaps we should think of peer-to-peer devotees not as buccaneers, but as privateers ; the patriots of the information age*f*.

Bowrey seems to use the term *buccaneerf* as a synonym for pirate, though in reality the buccaneers were much more. According to Wikipedia sources, buccaneer communities had established pockets of a democratic, largely stateless society. Crews operated as a democracy: the captain was elected by the crew and they could vote to replace him. The captain had to be a leader and a fighter ; in combat he was expected to be fighting with his men, not directing operations from a distance. Spoils were evenly divided into shares; the officers had a greater number of shares because they took greater risks or had special skills. Often the crews would sail without wages ; on account ; and the spoils would be built up over a course of months before being divided. There was a strong *esprit de corps*

among pirates. This allowed them to win sea battles: they typically outmanned trade vessels by a large ratio. For some time there was also a functional social insurance system, guaranteeing money or gold for battle wounds at a worked-out scale^f.

Thus, if anything, the buccaneers appear to have created and administered a more egalitarian and equal society than any in Europe at that time. And yet the Buccaneers movement did not last. They had begun life on the high seas as French sailors who had either jumped ship or decided to stay on in the Caribbean rather than return to Europe; they set up their own self-governed community. In time, they grew so powerful that they began to threaten the trading and imperial ambitions of the Spaniards, who claimed the islands that they lived on. A persistent challenge to Spain's economic and political ambitions in the Caribbean, captured buccaneers were treated with particular violence by the Spanish navy.

The English, who turned their attention westwards later than the other European powers, saw in the buccaneers a strategic way to challenge and possibly weaken the Spanish. They offered the buccaneers a safe haven at Port Royal in Jamaica. Thus they turned the buccaneers into privateers, an extension of their own navy against a common enemy. This converted the independent collective into one which worked to advance the economic and imperial interests of the English state.

In Bowrey's reading of buccaneer history, the first part of the story is transformed: the buccaneers are perceived not as shapers of a public space, challengers to the state and the market, but as pirates; those who challenge the status quo for private profit, without a justice objective. And when circumstances force a compromise and an acceptance of the nation-state framework, the privateers are written into the frame of patriotism, for now the same formerly illegal activities have sanction; and thus, notions of profit conveniently mix with notions of justice.

Down the ages, there has been a distinction; in law and practice; between pirates and privateers; it is a distinction which has been lost in the transition of the word piracy to the digital world. The distinction, however, is important, if we are to understand the dangers that certain kinds of commercial activity pose, and to whom.

In her reading of the relationship between modern piracy and the nation state, Bowrey leaves no space for a third alternative: that of pirates and privateers functioning from a higher understanding of justice than frameworks of laws and legal systems, which might at some points have had some State sanction. However, in suggesting that peer-to-peer networks are not a challenge to the existing State legal system, but in reality a new-age version of privateers, Bowrey is not wrong.

In many ways the open source movement is similar to the privateers of the age of maritime exploration. Using the letter of marquee, pirates and privateers were strategic players in opening up the sea routes, leading to a growth in trade volumes, and also in changing the power balance between Europe and Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries. Then, privateers and pirates were the spearhead, roaming the seas with tacit approval of the State; weakening competing powers and thus making it possible for the State to leverage its formal naval forces effectively to support commercial expansion in Asia. The open

source movement does something similar. Using contract law, it reaches out through commercial relationships to challenge some players in the market. However, the movement does not challenge the larger power dynamic with the State.

Napster, Kazaa and Grokster... Each such attempt, on a smaller scale, operates much like the open source movement, challenging not the architecture and power relationships of cyberspace governance, only the mechanics.

An Alternate Future

The early history of the Internet's expansion and growth echoes the past. Through the early voyages in the 16th century, Asian commodities, textiles and spices were sought out; through the early years of the Internet and expansion of the virtual market, the West has reached out to Asia for human talent, skills and labour, to maximise the economic opportunities that technological breakthroughs have enabled.

What is happening today in cyberspace has a distinct resonance with an earlier period in Maritime history as described in this essay. Tacit support is provided for creative innovations that will push technology and the overall boundaries of economic space. However, this support is conditional: as with privateers in the past, it is available until the status quo of existing corporate structures is threatened.

There are many similarities in trends and patterns, separated by time and space, in world affairs. And yet there have been moments in the past which suggest that an alternate trajectory could have been charted. Identifying a range of those moments may make it possible to ensure that this time around, human decisions can help chart an alternate future.

This text is adapted from a paper presented at the Asia Commons Conference, June 2006.

NOTES

1. Of all the performing arts, music has through the centuries been a constant site of resistance, and the domain of music has always been contested terrain where notions of authority have been challenged. With the coming of new technologies, big business and its authority to define the way music is experienced by the general public has been seriously challenged, using the institutions of the nation-state system. These three high-profile cases, in which the power of big business was weakened, relate directly to the way music is shared in the contemporary moment. For more information:
 On Grokster, see <http://www.wired.com/news/technology/0,1282,68033,00.html?tw=rss.TOP>
 On Kazaa, see <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.02/kazaa.html>
 On Napster, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napster>

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A City Feeding on Itself: Testimonies and Histories of 'Direct Action' Day

DEBJANI SENGUPTA

In 1946, Gopal Patha, a notorious goon of North Calcutta and leader of a gang, was 33 years old. Everybody called him by the nickname 'Patha' (goat, in Bengali) because he ran a meat shop in College Street. On the morning of 16 August that year, he left for his shop as usual, but when he heard about the trouble in the city he came back to his locality. "Muslim League volunteers were marching with long sticks in their hands. From Boubazar More to Harrison Road you could hear their slogans: '*Lar ke lenge Pakistan* (We'll fight and take Pakistan)!' Then I heard that two *goalas* (milkmen) had been killed in Beliaghata and riots have started in Boubazar..."

Patha organised his gang because, according to him, "it was a very critical time for the country; the country had to be saved. If we become a part of Pakistan, we will be oppressed^a so I called all my boys and said, this is the time we have to retaliate, and you have to answer brutality with brutality^a"¹. They armed themselves with knives, swords, cleavers, sticks and rods; Gopal had two American pistols tucked at his waist. He had procured these as well as some grenades from the American soldiers quartered in Calcutta in 1945. "If you paid them Rs 250 or bought them a bottle of whiskey, the soldiers would give you a .45 and 100 cartridges". As soon as the news of rioting spread, Patha's group of vigilantes swelled. They were joined by the Hindustani-speaking, non-Bengali *goalas* from the Janbajar area, each armed with a *lathi* (bamboo staff). "We were fighting those who attacked us^a We fought and killed them^a So if we heard one murder has taken place, we committed ten more^a the ratio should be one to ten, that was the order to my boys".

Like Gopal Patha, the local tough Jugal Chandra Ghosh also had some men at his disposal. He ran an *akhara* (wrestling club) at Beliaghata, and raised money from the neighbouring sawmills, factories and *khatahs* (dairy sheds), distributing it among his "boys". They carried out retaliatory attacks in the Beliaghata area and the Miabagan *basti* (slum settlement). "One murder would fetch ten rupees, and a wounding would bring five". He had links to certain political leaders of the city, and knew the Hindu Mahasabha secretary Bidhubhusan Sarkar as well as Suresh Chandra Bannerjee who later became a prominent leader of the Indian National Trade Union Congress. Ghosh's anger against the Muslim League flared when he saw the dead bodies from the first days of rioting. "I saw four trucks standing, all with dead bodies piled at least three feet high; like molasses in a sack, they were stacked on the trucks, blood and brain oozing out^a that sight had a tremendous effect on me"².

The picture that emerges from the interviews with these men, active during those riot-torn days of August 1946, also underlines the character of the mob that had gone on a rampage through the bylanes and streets of Calcutta. It often comprised of men working in a city not their own; the *goalas*, the *darwans* (watchmen), the coachmen, the *garoyans* (loaders) from the coal depots, the tailors, boatmen and petty traders who were 'upcountrymen', migrants who laboured in the city for their livelihood. The city, in which the sprawling garden houses of the rich merchants stood cheek by jowl with bustling bazaars and clusters of slums, provided job opportunities and residences to a large labour force drawn from the neighbouring districts and provinces of Bihar, Orissa and the United Provinces. Calcutta, British India's largest metropolis, had started on a downward slump when the colonial administration shifted the capital to Delhi. The number of migrant labourers slowly increased after 1918. By the mid-20th century, only three-tenths of the population was native-born; the working class of the city continued to come from outside. The 1896 Labour Inquiry Commission noted a large number of men migrating from Bihar and North West Provinces to Calcutta for jobs in the jute mills, and recorded that half of Calcutta's mill workers were 'upcountry' people. In 1931, Calcutta residents originally from other states of India constituted 31.70% of the city's population, while those from other districts of West Bengal constituted 30%.³

A large percentage of this workforce was employed as unskilled labour in jute and cotton mills, as well as railway workshops, glass and pottery works and leather tanning industries. The migrants were a highly volatile social group. Living in close contact with other immigrant workers, with strong ties of language and religion, they lived in a strange and alien city in extreme squalor and poverty. They had no family near them, and in their daily struggle against poverty and insecurity they depended to a large extent on the *sardar* (foreman) of the mill they worked in, who in many cases was from their village or community, and was of the same faith. The labourers mostly belonged to a category of uprooted peasants and artisans with little commitment to land or livelihood in the villages. In this unknown city they lived alone, in terrible conditions. This group of 'labouring poor' thus came to assume a strong notion of communal identity based on religion, language and

habitat. Although Calcutta was one of the leading industrial centres in the east, local Bengalis had very little share in all the economic activities; "the bulk of the industrial labour force and a small proportion of the small businessmen, artisans, traders, shopkeepers and casual labourers were Hindustani-speaking immigrants from North India"⁴.

"Calcutta developed as a city of lone men, and it was the single upcountrymen, Hindus and Muslims alike, who were most active in the Calcutta riots before 1946 and after"⁵. A significant number of Muslim rioters were *kasais* (butchers) from north and central Calcutta, as well as *khalasis* (dockworkers), masons and hackney carriage drivers. A large segment of Muslim mill-hands who had come to the city to join the Direct Action Day rally, described later in this essay, also took part in the looting and arson. Among the Hindus, contemporary accounts mention the large presence of upcountrymen as rioters. The *goalas*, sweepers and *darwans* took part in the riots, as did the local thugs and petty criminals. One police report blamed the *darwans* of the Clive and Canning Street business offices for most of the "vicious acts".

The rioters, however, were not confined only to the lower social strata. Prominent Muslim League leaders spent a great deal of time in police control rooms directing operations, and the role of H.S. Suhrawardy (who headed the Calcutta Muslim Association and was at that time Chief Minister under the Muslim League government) in obstructing police duties is well documented. S.K. Bhattacharya, a sub-inspector at the Lalbazar police station in 1946, recalls how they were not allowed to take any action for two days under the Muslim League Government; he also named a number of 'bad characters' with political connections who had directed mob frenzy. The notorious criminal Bombaiya, living in the New Market area, had links with the League and participated in riots, as did other goons such as Mina Punjabi of the Cornwallis *basti* and Munna Choudhuri in the Harrison Road area. Police intelligence reports stated that well before the Direct Action Day rally, Muslim League volunteers had acted on directives to mobilise ambulances; special petrol coupons, issued in the name of ministers, were used by League officials. These direct links with institutional politics ensured that the outbreaks of violence were highly organised. Hindu businessmen, prominent merchants, as well as politicians of the Hindu Mahasabha and some sections of the Congress, provided leadership to the mob. A number of INA (Indian National Army) men who had already come to the city to celebrate INA Day on 18 August were involved in rioting.

Even minority sections of the population, such as Anglo-Indians, took part. This is evident from the following eyewitness account of Syed Nazimuddin Hashim, a student at Presidency College in August 1946, who bore testimony to the shocking dimensions of the unrestrained violence in Calcutta, as well as the fatalities of the massacre. "The first victim I saw was a poor Oriya porter^a he hadn't a clue what was happening^a he had a basket and had just come into the side street^a a Muslim wearing a *lungi* broke away from the procession and hit him on the head with an iron rod. The fellow was absolutely startled, the blow broke open his ear^a All the food shops had closed, New Market had closed after three days of unrestrained rioting and looting, in which the Anglo-Indians took full part;

pickup trucks were used to loot a music and radio shop; departmental shops were looted in Wellington Square and Chowringhee Road, all the liquor shops were looted as well^a In College Street, where a number of Muslim booksellers plied their trade, their homes being in the nearby Kalabagan *basti*, Hashim saw "dead bodies piled up on both sides, men, women and children and all the books on the road, burnt, gutted"⁶.

It is well documented that from the 1920s onwards, Hindu and Muslim identities had hardened within the framework of institutional politics.⁷ In a Public and Judicial Department report covering the first half of 1940, the British government noted the alarming rise of "volunteer corps" or "private armies" of the political parties, an indicator of the increased communitarian tensions. "The militant volunteer corps formed by communal and political organisations subscribing to conflicting objectives and ideologies have grave potentialities for mischief in the event of an organised movement to create communal disorder or to subvert the administration", stated the report.⁸ In Bengal, the Muslim League Volunteer Corps increased its number to around 4,154, while the Congress Volunteer Corps also significantly increased its numbers in Bengal and Bombay. With this political army on standby, the Direct Action Day riots in Calcutta also saw, for the first time, a large scale participation of the upper and middle classes of the population. The conjunction of 'elite' and 'popular' communitarianism had never before been manifest to such a vivid extent. The reason why the Calcutta Riot of August 1946 is unique because of the unprecedented scale of violence and the participation of all classes of people, all variously affiliated, in the looting and arson. Certainly, the period 1946-47 was "the penultimate and worst phase of communal violence in pre-independent Bengal. The Great Calcutta Killing of August 1946, followed by the violence in Noakhali seven weeks later, began the spate of Partition riots which plagued the country and helped to prepare for a truncated settlement"⁹.

In the early months of 1946, the Cabinet Mission proposals, which aimed to discuss and finalise plans for the transfer of power from the British Raj to Indian leadership, providing India with independence under dominion status in the Commonwealth of Nations, had come to dominate the national political scene. Differences between the Congress and the Muslim League emerged on the question of whether to join the Interim Government. On 10 July, Jawaharlal Nehru declared in a press conference that although Congress would join the Constituent Assembly, it was free to modify the Cabinet Mission Plan. The Muslim League reacted immediately. In a resolution passed by the National Muslim Parliament held in Bombay on 29 July, it stated its resolve to reject the Cabinet Mission Proposals. "It has become abundantly clear that the Muslims of India would not rest content with anything less than the immediate establishment of an independent and full sovereign state of Pakistan and would resist any attempt to impose any Constitution^a or setting up of any Interim Government at the centre without the approval and consent of the Muslim League; the Council of the All India Muslim League is convinced that now the time has come for the Muslim Nation to resort to Direct Action to achieve Pakistan^a"

Consequently, 16 August 1946 was marked as Direct Action Day, when Muslims throughout the country were to observe a *hartal* (strike). In Bengal, with a Muslim League

ministry in power, a special effort would be made to demonstrate the strength of Muslim convictions about Pakistan. On that day, a Friday, *Dawn* came out with a full-page "pledge of sacrifice". The newspaper reiterated (p. 5): "Today Muslims of India dedicate anew their lives and all they possess to the cause of freedom. Today, let every Muslim swear in the name of Allah to resist aggression"; and stated that Direct Action^f was the only course left to Muslims, because "they offered peace but peace was spurned, they honoured their word but were betrayed, they claimed liberty but are offered thralldom; now might alone can secure their right". Even before the Muslim League National Council could work out the details of the day, the ministry in Bengal declared 16 August a public holiday against wish of the opposition Congress. A mass rally was planned at the foot of the Ochterlony Monument near Dalhousie Square in Calcutta, where Suhrawardy, Khwaja Nazimuddin and other League leaders were to speak.

That year, Badruddin Umar was 14 years old. His father Abul Hashim was a member of the Muslim League, and went on to become the general secretary of the party in Burdwan in 1947. On Direct Action Day, Umar was present in Calcutta with his father to take part in the rally. "We went to the Maidan by car, but the car could not move ahead because of the crowd^a I never saw such a huge crowd ever in my life^a" Another eyewitness describes the procession thus: "Most of the people showed signs of being intoxicated, either with alcohol or with enthusiasm^a They were shouting wild slogans, 'we'll fight, we'll seize'^a Slogans about the famous warrior Khalifa Hazrat Ali^a and they carried huge imaginary portraits of Jinnah in battledress, riding on a white horse, scimitar by the side, and leading the battle of the hordes against the infidels"¹⁰.

The meeting began late, at 4 pm, and by then the crowd had swelled to between 30,000 and 50,000 people. A contemporary account suggests that even before the meeting started, a great deal of agitation was visible among the crowd, who heckled the leaders. "People were shouting all around that riots had broken out in Rajabajar^a and Muslims are being slaughtered^a" In his address, Chief Minister Suhrawardy reportedly assured the crowd that the military and police were "restrained". Fuelled by rumour and the Chief Minister's assurance, the processionists, on their way back, began looting Hindu shops. Hamida Khanam, a young lecturer at Lady Brabourne College, recollects the plunder of that day. "In the afternoon^a around 5.30, I saw a huge crowd coming towards Park Circus^a I saw men carrying electric fans, brass utensils^a Then I saw the furniture^a I realised this was not a simple gathering, there was looting going on^a just a few moments later I saw people looting a sweetshop on the other side of the road that belonged to a Hindu family. I realised the situation was very grave"¹¹.

The massacre raged till 19 August. An 18 August telegram to the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, from Sir Fredrick Burrows, the Governor of Bengal, described the Calcutta events in grim detail: "All road traffic, shops, markets and businesses are at a standstill. Electricity and water are unaffected so far. Municipal scavenging of course is paralysed, and in some areas the streets are a shambles with corpses (grossly mutilated) and debris from the looted shops. Hospitals early this morning reported over 170 dead and nearly 1,000 injured, but

numbers of both categories must be many times these figures"¹². Within a few months, an official report claimed 3,700 dead and 11,000 seriously injured in the Calcutta riots.

Immediately following the carnage, relief camps and centres were set up by the government and voluntary organisations, and by 28 August were catering to nearly 200,000 people. A devastated Mahatma Gandhi wrote in an editorial of his newspaper *Harijan* (24 August): "Calcutta has earned a bad repute of late. It has seen too many wild demonstrations during the past few months. If that evil reputation is sustained for sometime longer it will cease to be a city of palaces; it will become a city of the dead". An eyewitness states the horror of those days in very real terms: "In Kalighat tram depot I found some bodies stacked like this, like gunny bags^a bodies^a hundreds of bodies, people killed on the roadside; instead of being in the road, they were dragged inside the tram depot and they were stacked like that^a I can't describe how the bodies were scattered and then stacked, it was terrible"¹³.

This account of the dead is corroborated by another chilling account of a necrophiliac city ravaged and destroyed. Phillip Talbot, a journalist present in Calcutta at that time, narrated the experience in a letter to Walter Rogers of the Institute of Current World Affairs:

It would be impossible to describe everything that we saw. A sense of desolation hung over the native bazaars. In street after street rows of shops had been stripped to the walls. Tenements and business buildings were burnt out, and their unconsumed innards strewn over the pavements. Smashed furniture cluttered the roads, along with concrete blocks, brick, glass, iron rods, machine tools ; anything that the mob had been able to tear loose but did not want to carry off. Fountains gushed from broken water remains. Burnt-out automobiles stood across traffic lanes. A pall of smoke hung over many blocks, and buzzards sailed in great, leisurely circles. Most overwhelming, however, were the neglected human casualties: fresh bodies, bodies grotesquely bloated in the tropical heat, slashed bodies, bodies bludgeoned to death, bodies piled on push carts, bodies caught in drains, bodies stacked high in vacant lots, bodies, bodies.¹⁴

"Watching a city feed on its own flesh is a disturbing experience", Talbot concluded. "In spite of our war heritage of callousness, I know that I was not alone in sensing profound horror this last week as Calcutta, India's largest metropolis and the second city of the Empire, resolutely set at work to cannibalise itself". Talbot's letter is remarkable because of the clarity of his testimonial. He was an outsider and a witness whose detachment and compassion were severely tested as he wrote about the carnage all around him. "In human terms, estimated casualties ran from the Provincial Government's absurdly reductive report of 750 dead to military guesses that 7,000 to 10,000 people might have been killed. Already more than 3,500 bodies have been collected and counted, and no one will ever know how many persons were swept down the Hoogly, caught in the clogged sewers, burned up in the 1,200 fires, or taken away by relatives who disposed of their bodies

privately. A reasonable guess, I think, is that more than 4,000 people died and 11,000 people were injured in what is already being called 'The Great Calcutta Killing' or 'The Week of the Long Knives'¹⁵.

The orgy of communitarian slaughter, along with the famine of 1944, two years earlier, initiated the decline of the metropolis of Calcutta. The city's vast hinterland, rich in natural and human resources, was unable to cope with the twin disasters, the impact of which is felt even today. From a contemporary perspective,

...The history of Calcutta during the years of the Second World War, and the troubled times that followed the conclusion of the war, was a prolonged nightmare. Blow fell upon blow like the continuous rains of the miserable rainy season in the city. There was hoarding, profiteering and black-marketing on an unprecedented scale. The sequel to this was the devastating Bengal famine of 1944. Thousands poured into the city from the famished countryside^a Equally indelible was the impression made by the bloody massacres, the stabbings in the back alleys, and the night raids into neighbourhoods that followed Jinnah's call for 'Direct Action' after the war. This was the Great Calcutta Killing of 1946, when the Muslim League Ministry headed by Suhrawardy virtually placed Calcutta in a state of siege. Then followed the Partition of Bengal, the streams of refugees that poured into Calcutta from East Bengal and the far-reaching disruption of the entire economy of the city. After that were to come industrial recession, rocketing prices, food scarcity, staggering unemployment, desperation among youths, renewed terrorism, street warfare between political gangs, collapse of public transport, paralysis of municipal services, the spread of slums, the stupendous increase in the number of pavement dwellers, ubiquitous destitution and beggary, the degradation of humanity to unimaginably low levels.¹⁶

The personal testimonies presented in this essay point not to a grand narrative of ethnic and social hatred but to the grotesque irruption of these cataclysmic modes within the frame of the everyday and the mundane. These sudden killers were ordinary men and women going about their daily lives; the turbulent spiral of a single event turned them into sadistic assassins, or stunned witnesses to the horrors of genocide. The violence they saw or perpetrated marked them forever. As the poet Shaukat Osman remarked, "^aWe are the prisoners of the past, prisoners of Partition, prisoners of the irrationality which led us to jump into darkness^a the past is still there^a it is haunting us like [a] ghost, all over the sub-continent"¹⁷.

Author's note:

I came upon the material used in this essay while doing archival research for a project on Partition. I was very moved by the testimonies, and felt I needed to compile them in order to understand one of the generally unanswered questions about Kolkata's past. I had always wondered how my city could have undergone such a

moment of violence that is now either almost forgotten, or vividly remembered as traumatic. I wanted to access the 'little' histories of local witnesses, how they were haunted by the killings even as they continued to go about their daily business in the city. This essay is an attempt to read that convulsion of extraordinary violence through the observations of 'ordinary' people.

NOTES

Various oral testimonies that appear in this text are excerpts from interviews for a BBC programme on 50 years of India's independence, conducted by Andrew Whitehead and Anuradha Awasthi, who gave the author permission to use this material. The tapes can be accessed at the archives of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. They are referred to here as Partition Tapes, with relevant number.

1. Partition Tapes: 74.
2. Ibid: 72.
3. M. Ghosh et al. *A Study in Urban Growth Dynamics* (1972, Calcutta), p. 103.
4. Rajat Ray. *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1857-1939* (Vikas Publishing House, 1979, Delhi), p. 3.
5. Suranjan Das. *Communal Riots in Bengal* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 22.
6. Partition Tapes: 71.
7. Joya Chatterjee. *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-47* (Cambridge University Press, 1995, Cambridge).
8. L/PJ/8/678. The British Library Archives, London.
9. Suranjan Das, op. cit., p. 6.
10. Partition Tapes: 70.
11. Ibid: 69.
12. L/1/425. The British Library Archives, London.
13. Partition Tapes: 68. Testimony of Kalim Sharifi, medical student and IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) activist.
14. L/1/425. The British Library Archives, London.
15. Ibid.
16. Rajat Ray, op. cit., pp. 225-26.
17. Partition Tapes: 69.

“Kothai Aj Shei Shiraj Sikder (Where Today Is that Shiraj Sikder?)” Terrorists or Guerrillas in the Mist

NAEEM MOHAIEMEN



*The man who had stuck the gun in his mouth now came over and warmly shook his hands.
The young man was no longer a terrorist.*

¡ Afsan Chowdhury

Introduction

In 1971, Pakistan's eastern wing (today's Bangladesh) broke away after a genocide where an estimated 1 million Bengalis were killed.¹ On 16 December, celebrating Bengalis poured into the streets to greet the liberating forces of the Bengali *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army) and its ally, the Indian army. In the middle of ecstatic celebrations, not many people noticed the scattered members of the Sharbahara Party, giving out leaflets with a counter-narrative

dramatically opposed to the national mood. Copies of the leaflets have not survived, but the slogan was similar in spirit to that circulated by the Pakistan Communist Party after the 1947 Partition of India:

Lakhon insaan bhookhen hai/Yeh azaadi jhooti hai
Millions of people are still hungry/This freedom is a lie

In that moment of extreme and unexpected euphoria, dissonant notes were easily ignored. But indicators of the potential brutality of the future Bengali state were nested in moments like the ruthless and porno-voyeuristic public bayoneting of people accused of collaborating with the Pakistan army.² Similarly, within this quiet moment of leaflet distribution were the roots of a decade-long guerilla war, and retaliatory 'dirty' wars that ripped apart the fabric of Bangladesh and initiated an anarchy trajectory from which it has never recovered.

The turbulent 1970s were a textbook case of Third-World disillusionment. *Bongo Bondhu* (Friend of Bengal) Sheikh Mujib was a powerful symbolic force for the liberation movement, but an inept peacetime leader, tolerating cronyism, corruption and a brutal security apparatus. Mujib's downward spiral was marked by the eventual abrogation of democracy (preceding Indira Gandhi's Emergency rule by two years) and the birth of paramilitary squadrons that created a reign of terror. One key justification given for these excesses was the alleged need to fight back against the underground guerrilla armies of the left, dedicated to capturing state power through armed insurrections.

Between 1972 and 1975, Bangladesh saw the rise of many factions of Communist and ultra-left parties. Some key groups followed the China line of people's wars, which spread from the villages into towns and were marked by lightning strikes, bomb attacks, targeted assassinations and seizures of public buildings. Among many factions, the most powerful and well-armed were the Sharbahara Party (*sharbahara* translates as 'those who have lost everything'), led by the charismatic Shiraj Sikder. In a short span, the Sharbahara succeeded in destabilising much of the country, culminating in the successful nationwide strike of 1974. Reacting with ferocity, the government's paramilitary squads (*Rokkhi Bahini*) unleashed a counter-terror campaign against suspected Sharbahara members, executing hundreds of civilians. The finale came in 1975, when Shiraj Sikder was captured and killed while trying to 'flee' police custody.

While Shiraj Sikder's programme of a Maoist Bangladesh did not materialise, in death he exacted a vengeance of sorts against Sheikh Mujib. The execution of Sikder, the most visible of a series of state killings of 'terrorists', precipitated a rapid decline for the Mujib government. Eight months later, Mujib and his whole family were dead, killed by a military coup (the same army he had infuriated by creating the *Rokkhi Bahini*). At the time of his death, there were many things that puzzled Asia analysts. How could such a successful coup be mounted by a coterie of junior officers? Why was there no people's resistance on the streets? What happened to the bondhus of *Bongo Bondhu*? One military officer later told

author Anthony Mascarenhas, "We were ready to do anything for [Mujib]. But look how he behaved".

This sentiment was shared on the streets, aided by revulsion over the *Rokkhi Bahini*'s campaign of terror. Of course, not everything can be ascribed to the Sharbahara Party ; there were other factions that were also launching attacks against the state. The army itself was a hotbed of intrigue and factions ; Maoist, Islamist, pro-Indian, and anti-Indian. But the Sikder killing accelerated the unravelling of Mujib's legitimacy. If the state could take any measure in the hunt for 'terrorists', so could the army, the leftists, and all other factions fighting for control of Bangladesh.³

Before looking at the Sharbahara Party, it is necessary to explore the contours of the post-1971 conflict, including the contradictions of a liberation war waged on behalf of a city elite, replacing a Pakistani bourgeois with a Bengali petit-bourgeois. We need to also examine the role of mythmaking, that turned Shiraj Sikder into a sanitised Che icon, extending to the recent use of his image in a campaign against suicide bombings by 'militant Islamists' ; a juxtaposition that Sikder would have either approved or abhorred. The current-day parallels are almost banal when we look at the deployment of the terminology of 'terrorism' in justifying rapid increase in state power, surveillance, torture and extra-judicial killings ; a technique first rehearsed during the 1970s 'dirty wars', and revived in the last two years as Bangladesh faces a repetition of the turbulent 1970s through conflicts with new militant Islamist groups.

A Dirty Independence

The years 1972-75 marked a dramatic reversal of fortune for Bangladesh. In four short years, the reign of Sheikh Mujib had transformed into a Shakespearean tragedy. Beset on all sides by corruption, crime and spasms of extreme violence, each fresh incident smeared even more dirt on Mujib's image. In a vignette from Mujib's final years, the late author Humayun Azad reflected on the 'twilight of the gods':

During the 1974 floods, the Guardian wrote a long feature about Bangladesh; they wrote that Mujib's time was coming to an end, he had become a dictator, he would not last more than six months. But Sheikh Mujib is still flying over the flood-hit areas and speaking in possessive terms like 'my people', 'my', 'me'. When I read that report, my heart ripped apart, for the country and its leader.⁴

While there were many aspects to this downward spiral, a defining factor was the 'people's war' waged by the Sharbahara Party and other groups like the National Socialist Party (JSD)'s *Gono Bahini* (People's Army), and the ferocious response from the Bangladesh government, culminating in the creation of the infamous *Lal Bahini* (Red Army) and *Rokkhi Bahini* (Protector Army). Like Peru against *Sendero Luminoso*, Germany against *Rotee Armee Faktion*, and many others, the government's suspension of civil liberties, declaration of emergency powers, mass detention, torture and random killings gave a pyrrhic victory

to the underground groups. By forcing the government to take extreme repressive measures, their charges against the 'bourgeois, exploitative state' were being proven true.

The roots of this conflict stretch back into the first years of independent Pakistan. From the early 1950s, various communist parties emerged as significant forces in East Pakistan, attracting scores of young members. Following the line of 'violent, socialist revolution', the East Pakistan communists successfully staged the Mymensingh and Nachol revolts, but failed to convert these actions into mass support, or capture of state power. Some efforts were stymied by Pakistan's repeated military dictatorships, but other setbacks were due to being eclipsed by the more popular Awami League (AL, eventually led by Sheikh Mujib) and National Awami Party (NAP). At key moments, the various left parties were superseded by more crafty political players (as during the 1968 mass uprising that ousted the Ayub Khan dictatorship) or were out of step with mass sentiment (as when pro-Peking groups refused to support the 1971 liberation war because China and Pakistan were allies). Leading up to the 1968 revolt, violent protests against the Pakistani military junta had a marked class-conscious face, with noted industrialists dragged from their cars and beaten by students. An exuberant young Tariq Ali visited both Pakistans and wrote in breathless prose⁵ about events that appeared, at the time, to have the inevitability of 'revolution'.

But very quickly after the fall of the Ayub military regime, Mujib's Awami League asserted control over the East Pakistan half of the movement and shifted the focus to Bengali nationalism. This accomplished two strategic tasks, which accelerated the isolation and radicalisation of the left parties. First, it replaced class-based demands with a narrower linguistic and ethnic agenda, splitting the movement from the allied uprising in West Pakistan. Second, it blunted the more strident anti-capitalist critique of the movement, instead moulding it to the interests of the AL's middle-class leadership.

Events in Pakistan gained momentum after 1968, moving in rapid succession to the first universal elections of 1970, Sheikh Mujib/Awami League's unexpected victory, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's refusal to allow a Bengali politician to rule united Pakistan, 'good faith' negotiations between Bhutto and Mujib while the Pakistan army secretly deployed in the streets, the breakdown of negotiations and army crackdown of 26 March, and finally the beginning of the Bangladesh liberation war. Through all this, the Awami League decisively took control of the movement, marginalising the left parties and later turning on them during the war.

For the pro-Peking left (East Pakistan Communist Party: Marxist-Leninist, which had already split into three factions), the war presented a crisis of indecision. Many of their theorists, inspired by China's support of the Pakistani position, described Bengali nationalism's clash with the Pakistani ruling class as a "fight between two ruling dogs". From that position, a boycott of the war seemed logical. Some in the left front became entangled in these rhetorical gymnastics and stayed on the sidelines. This was to prove fatal for part of the left, losing vital leverage over post-independence government formation.

While pro-Peking groups were hamstrung by China's endorsement of Pakistan, groups like the Sharbahara Party faced no contradictions. The Party had already gone underground and started attacks against Pakistani institutions in 1970. The war simply allowed them to

continue those attacks. Ironically, it was the Sharbahara Party that called for a total break from Pakistan as early as 1968, while Mujib's programme for independence remained unclear until the Pakistan army crackdown forced the decisive break. Although Mujib antagonised Pakistani negotiators by flying the Bangladesh flag on his car during negotiations, he also sent mixed messages by saying "*Pakistan Zindabad* (Long live Pakistan)!" at the end of his famous "the struggle is for freedom" speech of 7 March, and by allowing himself to be arrested after the crackdown. By contrast, Sharbahara Party historians argue that Shiraj Sikder was actually the first to call for independence, and that even the current Bangladesh flag is a metamorphosis of a design first created by the Sarbahara Party.⁶ In the decisive party document "The Thesis of East Bengal's Worker's Movement"⁷, Sikder outlined the following conflicts for East Bengal:

1. Pakistani colonialism's national conflict with East Bengal's people
2. East Bengal's agricultural class' conflict with feudalism
3. East Bengal people's conflict with American imperialism, Russian social imperialism and Indian expansionism
4. East Bengal working class' conflict with the bourgeois class

The slogan was Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, but one of the primary enemies was Pakistani neo-colonialism. The thesis went on to outline four paths of armed rebellion against the state: guerrilla warfare; red army, formed by farmers; eventual regular army from the nucleus of the guerrilla army; and finally, long-lasting, 'difficult' war.

The Sharbahara Party were already underground, having launched bomb attacks (on Marx's birthday) against the Pakistan Council building, the Pakistan National Reconstruction Bureau and the American Information Center⁸ in 1970. When war broke out, the group stayed underground and joined the battle against the Pakistan army. But as the fighting continued, the Indian high command expressed concern that leftists within the Bengali liberation army would link up with Indian guerrilla groups like the Naxalites, creating the dreaded pan-Bengal insurrection. To counter this possibility, the Awami League encouraged another faction to rise up inside the regular *Mukti Bahini*, this one imaginatively dubbed *Mujib Bahini* and tasked with sidelining the leftists within the guerrilla army. The *Mujib Bahini* was at various times accused of killing key leftist members of the Bengali liberation force, with the Indians quietly supporting these fratricidal struggles. The Sharbahara Party also lost members in these struggles, which hardened their enmity towards the Awami League. On liberation day, Sharbahara members were already passing out leaflets calling this a "false freedom" and preparing for the coming armed struggle against the new government.

People's War without End

By 1973, the Bengali nationalism that was a unifying force in anti-Pakistan agitations was losing cohesive power, as in contemporary writer Ahmed Sofa's sarcastic polemic: Our leaders are constantly talking about doing this and that to the Bengali language. The gist

of their speeches are: O Bengali people, you have suffered a lot to get an independent nation. Bangladesh is a beautiful country, that is why we call it the mother. Bengali language is the mother goddess' language. Those who speak against it, we call them collaborators and Pakistani spies. You have sacrificed a lot for this Bengali language. If independent Bangladesh cannot give you clothes to wear, cover up your privates with Bengali culture. And if you cannot get two meals of rice a day, chew on Bengali language with great relish! f⁹

Instead of a period of calm, 1972 and '73 were ruptured by witch-hunts against those who were alleged to have collaborated with the Pakistani army; a golden opportunity, as during 1947 Partition riots, to settle scores and grab property. Phrases entered the lexicon for the chief inquisitors: *hajji* (those who had gone to India during the war), *khalifa* (Awami League student leaders who began a reign of terror in the universities) and 16th Division (those who hid out during the war but came out with guns on 16 December 1971, when the Indian army marched into Dhaka). The *hajjis* who had returned from Calcutta kept attacking everyone as collaborators. Finally, the leftist newspaper *Holiday* lashed out with an editorial: "Seventy-Five Million Collaborators!" The country paused in its collective madness. If every Bangladeshi who stayed behind was a collaborator, who was left as a patriot?

As things continued to deteriorate, confrontation through guerrilla war was a declared core of the Sharbahara Party's programme for 'socialist revolution'. But armed struggle was not the default choice for other groups such as the leftist Chatra Union and the JSD (National Socialist Party, a splinter group of radicals who left the Awami League). These non-violent positions shifted after police firing killed Chatra Union students protesting against the Vietnam war outside the US embassy. Mujib, who had earned American enmity during the war, was now reversed into being an "American stooge", and anti-Mujib fury boiled over into violent street protests. Another decisive moment came when Mujib's Awami League started losing local elections at the universities to JSD and Chatra Union. Frightened by the spectre of militant communism, Mujib threatened in public to "*lal ghora dabrayya dibo* (smash the red horse)". Unwilling or unable to trust the army, Mujib created his private militias of *Lal Bahini* and *Rokkhi Bahini* to fight the insurgents. It was the rise of the *Bahinis* that pushed JSD and others to also start arming themselves. There is an apocryphal story that Fidel Castro, during his first meeting with Mujib, warned him against unpunished collaborators: "Your Excellency, they will finish you!" Mujib carried that paranoia back with him, imagining traitors in every corner. The Sharbahara Party was the most obvious enemy, but Mujib isolated himself from all other left factions as well.

While JSD and others were taking up guns, Sharbahara Party's basic strategy remained the same. They had always argued that participating in elections was a sham; only Mao's 'barrel of a gun' thesis would bring about 'Marxism-Leninism-Maoism'. The strategy was to gain control of remote areas of the country, especially through targeted assassinations of 'class enemies', bomb attacks, gun battles with the *Rokkhi Bahini*, sabotaging railway stations, blocking roads, taking over police stations, camps and administrative posts. We can decode party pamphlets to find evidence of numerous guerrilla operations, including those aimed at grabbing control of Mymensingh Medical College, Dhaka Bydder Bazar Bank,

Pathrail Camp, Sunamganj Dhormopasha Camp, and Tangail Pathrail Camp. Targeted assassinations were aimed at 'class enemies', especially high-profile victims such as Madaripur Police Assistant Samad Mathbor, Mogbazar paramilitary leader Razlul Huq, Mohammedpur leader Abdur Rahman, Barisal MP Mukim, Sheikh Mujib's private bodyguard Mohiuddin, Tekerhat leader Shahjahan Sardar, Madaripur leader Niru and Bhola leader Ratan Chowdhury. In 1974, attacks intensified as bomb attacks blew up the Titas Gas Centre, the Nakalpara railway lines and finally, in a move possibly telegraphing future social-conservative tendencies, bomb attacks on the offices of three pornography magazines ; *Kamona*, *Bashona* and *Binodon*.¹⁰

The increasingly violent attacks were celebrated inside the Sharbahara Party as being in line with a strategy of pushing the state towards chaos, which would allow areas of the country to be liberated. A September 1974 leaflet, one of many issued by Shiraj Sikder, outlines a grand strategy of apocalyptic confrontation:

Even though our enemies have increased pressure on us through army, BDR and *Rokkhi Bahini*, they have not been able to harm us and our rainy season attacks continue. Our guerillas are killing national enemies and grabbing hold of thanas and police faris. Eventually we will form a regular army and create liberated areas. This is the right answer to smash the teeth of the puppet government of Bangladesh. Eventually these puppets will be forced to call in the Indian army to save them. When the colonialist Indian army enters East Bengal, all the masses will join our national liberation struggle.¹¹

Even though the Sharbahara had cornered the Mujib government with a relentless series of actions, this strategy of armed struggle leading towards total breakdown of the state was not without debate inside the party. Particularly controversial was the policy of targeted assassinations, and debate raged as to whether this was winning converts or alienating the masses. Sharbahara member Raisuddin Ariff later became an apostate against this policy, as he outlined in his autobiography: In the villages, I noticed that the landless, day labourers and poor farmers accepted the party line slowly. Young men grabbed the line about killing class enemies like a fish on a hook, but the farmers were the inverse. A day or two after joining the party, young men would show up with a list of 'national enemies' in the area. When I looked at these new recruits and their long list of 'enemies', I would feel a revolutionary zeal, but also the first pangs of fear¹².

Internal documents from this time indicate enthusiasm for successful actions, coupled with a growing unease about mass support ; as explored in pamphlets such as "Lack of Recruits & Several Solutions" (1973) and "Several Points About Economic Operations" (1973).¹³ In a dramatic shift at the end of 1974, the Sharbahara Party now attempted a transition to a mass movement by launching a national strike. For the first time, the strike call also included groups that were formerly identified as "enemies". Strike leaflets began by addressing the combined "Workers-Farmers-Students-Teachers-Intellectuals, Employees

of Government & Private Sector, Army, BDR, Police, Patriotic Political Parties, Groups and People of East Bengal", and then went on to say: There is famine in the land. Naked, hungry crowds wander our towns, villages, roads, terminals and stations. Their screams for one mouthful of rice, one piece of bread, tears Bengal's skies apart. Meanwhile, the Awami League traitors, black marketeers, assassins and hoarders are becoming rich overnight. These traitors promised rice at 20 taka per *maund*, wheat at 10 taka per *maund*. And now rice sells at more than 300, wheat at 200...^{f14}

The two-page leaflet continued in this fashion with a litany of state crimes, all of which rang true for most people, and ended with a call for a two-day nationwide strike.

It is an indicator of how much the tide had turned against Mujib that the Sharbahara felt that a strike could be held on 15 and 16 December, the latter being Bangladesh's Victory Day. In 1971, when Bangladesh first became independent, the nucleus of the Sharbahara was distributing leaflets calling it a "false freedom". This rhetorical flourish of labelling victory day as "black day" was out of step with the popular mood of the time. Yet, within three years, the disintegration of Mujib's authority was complete; and now the Sharbahara tapped into a vein of popular anger that responded to the symbolism of the 16 December strike. Bangladesh has seen many *hartals* (strikes) in its 35-year history. But the Sharbahara Party *hartal* was the first successful national strike in post-independence Bangladesh. By taking Sheikh Mujib's most famous weapon against the 1960s Pakistan regime, and inverting it to target him, Sikder invaded the popular imagination. Where Mujib once thundered, "I want to say it very clearly, from today all the courts, schools and offices of Bangladesh will be closed indefinitely!"¹⁵, Sikder now taunted a Mujib-become-Caesar: "Offices, courts, schools, factories, transportation, markets, everything will be closed. We will use meetings, rallies, strikes, gherao, revolt, uprising and armed struggle to expel the Awami traitors and their masters"¹⁶.

Facing an unprecedented challenge to state power, the Mujib government understood that simply calling their opponents *shontrashis* (terrorist) and *dushkrithokari* (evil-doers) was no longer enough. Capture and execution of underground leftists became the highest priority for the state apparatus. Manhunts went wide and indiscriminate. Historian Afsan Chowdhury describes an experience with one such raid and mistaken identity:

In the rooms where the books were kept, they found a few Russian editions of the Marxist literary pantheon on his table with old Karl's face printed on them. "Is it you?" The young man wondered if it was better to deny or to affirm. They seemed to have made up their minds anyway. "Yes, it's me". They nodded and kept urging him to search as they stood with guns cocked at the full. So, a few people were alive that day who thought that Karl Marx lived in Dhaka and wrote books with his own picture on the cover. Finally they shoved the barrel inside his mouth. The metallic taste was strange and repulsive, mixing death and saliva in his throat. Then they asked the question again. He couldn't answer with this mouthful. He tried to move his head. Is this how it's done finally?... A sort of senior officer stormed inside and demanded

to know what the charges were. Suddenly nobody seemed to know any. Was there a complaint? There was no answer. Intelligence report? Silence. He then asked to them to set him free. The man who had stuck the gun in his mouth now came over and warmly shook his hands. The young man was no longer a terrorist.¹⁷

But mistakes like this did not continue forever; eventually the security forces became more cunning and efficient. Infiltration of the Sharbahara ranks had already begun, and within two weeks of that fateful national strike, Sikder was captured in Chittagong on 1st January 1975. Within 24 hours he was dead, shot in the back while trying to 'escape' from the police van. It was an account no one believed, the Sheikh's personal stock had sunk that low. Even a pro-government newspaper felt the need to add the phrase "the government alleges" to the news report.

Conflicting statements surround the execution of Sikder. Facts and fiction are hopelessly intertwined, and separating them would require a separate archaeological project. Each little piece of the legend gives rise to many associated curiosities. Various accounts talk about Sikder being transported blindfolded in a civilian plane from Chittagong to Dhaka (another book talks about a 'special' helicopter),¹⁸ pilots who refused to fly because of violation of international aviation laws (yet none of them came forward in three decades), passengers who heard Sikder beg for water (an odd detail which sounds like a remix of the Karbala martyrdom scenario), a police officer who ran over and kicked him on the chest on the airport tarmac, savage beatings and torture in Dhaka (a valuable political prisoner killed without any information being extracted), and the secret meeting with Mujib where Sikder allegedly sealed his fate with his defiance. None of these stories have been verified, since every account is second- or third-hand, and eyewitnesses are never named.

What is uncontested is the fairly prosaic nature of Sikder's death, shot in the back while 'trying to escape'. Whatever controversies may continue about those last 24 hours, the public perception was final: Mujib had personally ordered this very public, not-so-secret killing. This impression was solidified when Mujib gave his infamous parliamentary speech (often referred to as *Kothai aj shei Shiraj Sikder* (Where today is that Shiraj Sikder?))^f which would haunt the Awami League in decades to come: We forgave them all. [We] told them love your country. Accept the independence of the country. Stay in the country. But some did not change. They even now get money from abroad to conspire against the independence of Bangla. They think I don't know anything (about them). One that kills people in the darkness of night, he thinks no one can catch him. Where today is that Shiraj Sikder?"¹⁹

Revolutionaries or Trojan Horses?

Today, 35 years after independence, Bangladeshi history continues to be hotly debated. Many of these 'facts' have the power to wreck political careers that are closely identified with foundational lore. Each political party has an assigned, or acquired, performative role on the national stage. Awami League is the party that brought independence under Mujib; Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is the group that 'righted the wrongs' of Mujib and

brought Islam back; Jamaat-e-Islami is the party that denies its leadership of death squads for the Pakistani army in 1971; and finally, the left has been on the losing end of each of the major historic turns. 'Live' debates continue over whether Mujib intended to declare independence, why Mujib allowed himself to get arrested by the Pakistan army, whether Zia-ur Rahman was the first to give the radio announcement of the independence war, who knew about the anti-Mujib coup in advance, who gave the order to kill the remaining Awami League leadership in jail when the anti-Mujib coup-plotters were overthrown, why Zia gave the order to execute the red-sympathiser Colonel Taher who had freed him from prison, and which Jamaat members headed up death squads.

Some of the more complex questions involve Shiraj Sikder, especially his death in police custody, the extent of Sharbahara Party's popular appeal, and whether the Party would eventually have entered open politics. There is even a question of whether his sudden execution was arranged by anti-Mujib forces, since with Sikder dead, the Mujib assassination could proceed without any fear of bringing a Red Bengal to power. Today there is no political party that can claim to be Sharbahara heirs and effectively control (or choke off) this debate. Sikder's death, and the government's subsequent infiltration of the Party, brought an effective end to this underground force. In the years following his death, the Sharbahara were riven by a suicidal impulse as the guerrilla army split apart to form numerous warring factions. The issue of who had betrayed Sikder became the most pressing ideological issue, as party factions saw traitors in their midst and slaughtered internal class enemies. Even party members who were caught by the police were suspect, as Raisuddin Ariff describes in his memoirs: If any party leader or member was seized and put in jail, they would lose connection with underground activities and would be considered diseased by 'inactivity', 'opportunism', and 'surrender'. And since we were finally released from jail by a reactionary government in spite of being underground leaders, this proves without a doubt that we have compromised and become 'renegades'²⁰.

As the Sharbahara devoured its own children, the party faded from view and by the 1990s had ceased to be a player. The rightist Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) now emerged as an unexpected supporter of an investigation into the death of Shiraj Sikder. But this was only politics as usual. The BNP that had replaced 'socialism' with 'Islam' in the constitution, and executed Colonel Taher and his dreams of 'red revolution', was hardly interested in the class warfare thesis of Sikder. But it was useful to revive the memory of the brutal 'anti-terrorist' campaigns of 1973-75, because this would embarrass the BNP's main rival the Awami League.²¹ The only part of Sikder's thesis that does fit the BNP platform is his strident anti-Indian language, although by a sleight of hand his opposition to 'American and Russian imperialism' is made irrelevant. Today, election cycles often return the Sikder killing to the news, continuing to prod public imagination and revive conspiracy theories.

Beyond the rhetoric of 'terrorism', there were many among the Bengali intelligentsia who blame the armed left movements for creating anarchy in Bangladesh and ushering in two decades of military rule (the fact that Pakistan needed no such leftist insurgency to impose martial law is ignored in this analysis). In some recent text, a mixture of admiration-

loathing comes through, as in Humayun Azad's description of the end of the liberation war: Their long hair and flowing beard looked like a flag to us, the rifle in their hand was freedom's signal¹⁹ Just as Che and Castro had appeared as romantic heroes in the '60s, after December 1971, thousands of Ches and Castros appeared in our midst^f. But later, that same admiration is transformed to hate: The fakes now appeared as revolutionaries; dressed in masks of Mao Zedong, Charu Majumdar, Guevara, they ran riot in our cities^a Many of those revolutionaries were only killers, the core of their socialism was murder. They thought that random killings were class struggle^{f22}.

Although more restrained in his rhetoric, Afsan Chowdhury satirises the effectiveness of these movements, and also hints at a common fear; that India and other external forces were using insurrectionary left movements to destabilise the country: In secret meetings, comrades swore to kill all class enemies and swore at the cigarette that had died bitterly on tired lips. The butt ached from sitting on hard floors. Tomorrow we would have a revolution surely. "At best next year", the man from Calcutta promised. He was an Indian Maoist imported from Ballygunge. He soon had a Bangladeshi passport, soon he had friends dropping in, soon he had set up a network. And soon he had picked up the local accent. He knew the enemy better than the local lads did. He knew the friends even better^{f23}.

Looking at the voluminous legend that sprung up around the Sharbahara Party, we always note a desire to make Shiraj Sikder into a permanent icon. This tendency comes even from Raisuddin Ariff, a man attacked after release from jail as a "traitor" to the Sharbahara cause because he had started questioning the policy of 'slaughtering national enemies'. In his three-volume memoir, Ariff sets out a partial *mea culpa* for the Party's mistakes, including the policy of targeted assassinations. For these sins, Ariff was designated a "renegade" by the remaining rump of the Sharbahara Party. Yet even though his books commit the sin of self-criticism, Ariff does not blemish the personal reputation of Sikder.

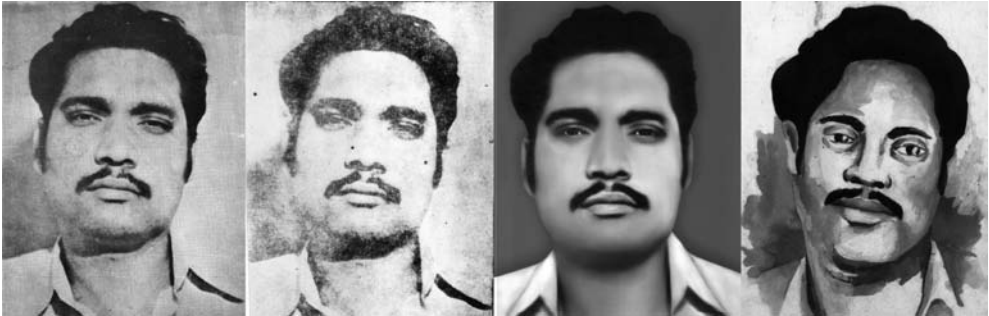
A typical party-sympathetic account comes from Khokon and Tushar,²⁴ who talk in hushed tones about the "brilliant young student of the engineering university", and provide small personal details such as his eating habits ("Shiraj Sikder enjoyed eating biscuits while dipping them into thick *mashuri daal*"). Minute observations were especially necessary for constructing a visual of a mysterious leader, whose sightings were rare and limited to the inner circle. Even more important were stories of his martial prowess ("at that time there were very few people who could survive a bare-hand fight with Sikder"), his fight against capture ("as soon as he pulled out his revolver, Shiraj Sikder punched him with his left fist. Shiraj Sikder had another identity. He knew martial arts very well") and his last words to Sheikh Mujib ("Don't touch me, Mr President, remember you talk to *the* Shiraj Sikder!").²⁵ These accounts, while plausible, are riddled with the problem of invisible witnesses (nothing in Khokon-Tushar has footnotes) and conflicting accounts. To take just one example, Khokon-Tushar write that Sikder was flown by "special helicopter" to Dhaka, even though all other narratives talk about a commercial airline. Did a "helicopter" simply sound more dangerous and heroic?

The necessity for a mythology around Sikder was intensified after his capture. Talking about the reaction to the newspaper reports announcing his death, Ariff remembers:

Looking at that photograph of a man with thick moustache and two sideburns, party workers grabbed the photo and ripped it into shreds, screaming that it was a fake. Their great leader Shiraj Sikder could never look like a 'thug' like that. Perhaps in their imagination Shiraj Sikder was a rare angelic demi-god whose face would have a heavenly glow, the aura of a freshly flowered rosebud²⁶.

Ariff's assessment of this hero-worship came in 1991, when he published the first volume of his memoirs. At that time, his disenchantment with the party seemed particularly high ; everything was written through the lens of "historic mistakes" and contradictions. By 1998, when the third volume came out, his stance seemed to have softened. Now, it was his own prose that had a quiet, reverential tone:

In my imagination, a revolutionary leader would be wearing a dirty, oily *khaddar panjabi*, high-powered thick-frame black glasses, face covered with prickly beard. From his fingers would hang cheap *bogla* cigarettes made from the harshest tobacco. And how old would he be? White-haired and over 65, like Ho Chi Minh? Or knocking at the gates of 60, like Lenin-Stalin? Or over 60 at least, like Mao Tse-Tung? But no, I learnt to my total shock that our revolutionary party leader was only 28 years old. He preferred to wear smart, sharply turned-out pant-shirts and expensive sunglasses. In fact, he was the sort of ultra-modern man we used to get jealous of in a past life. As for vices, not only did he not smoke *bidis* or cigarettes, even betel-*shupari* had not passed his lips.²⁷



Return of the 'Terrorist'

Today, 30 years after the synchronised deaths of Sikder and Mujib, the rhetoric of 'terrorism' vs. 'guerrilla army' has returned. The language may remain similar but the players have gone through a reshuffle. The current crisis started four years ago with a series of bombings targeting cultural events like the Bengali New Year. Later the target shifted to judges, public buildings and Awami League politicians (who may be forgiven for thinking they are stuck in a re-run of the 1970s). In a dramatic acceleration, a series of coordinated bomb blasts went off all over Bangladesh in 2005. Finally, the introduction of

suicide bombers, a new ingredient in the political cocktail, has pushed the country towards the panic button.

This time around, the protagonists reflect our post-Cold War axes. The bombers are believed to be 'Islamist terrorists'; and the shadowy underground Islamist group JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, or Awakened Muslim Masses) has obligingly stepped forward to take credit. In the 1970s, every insurrectionary movement was tagged as 'CIA agent' or 'Indian agent' (the Sharbahara inconveniently did not fit this pattern as they were against 'American and Indian imperialism'). Today's conspiracy theorists look at India's RAW (Research & Analysis Wing) or Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) as the puppet-masters behind groups like the JMB.

The exact political agenda of the new militant groups is not clear (and perhaps it was unclear in the '70s as well). If their intention is to establish an Islamic state, is it really necessary to push the country towards anarchy to take over? The largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, is now fully recovered from the misadventures of 1971 and could ride into power in the future on a wave of anti-corruption disgust (perhaps a repeat of the Hamas scenario). But it is possible that groups like JMB represent strands within political Islam for whom Jamaat is not radical enough. We are reminded that Sharbahara, JSD and many others talked of establishing a socialist state, and yet their anger was directed at an Awami League that had inserted 'socialism' into the Constitution. Clearly the League's 'socialism' was insufficient to placate the left, as Jamaat today is seen as too slow by the more militant Islamists.

Whatever the political configurations, on an individual level today's suicide bombers seem to have rejected the escalating 'modernity' project represented by the mushrooming of an aggressive consumerist culture (or you could argue that consumerism has rejected them). The militant recruits can't afford to drink Coke, have Josh ringtone cell phones, buy bar-coded fruit at Agora mall or wear jeans from Westecs. Within their violent, anarchic program (what Tariq Ali calls "Islam-anarchists") is also fury at an economic system that has left them behind. Regardless of the inspiration, funding and ultimate goals, the arrival of 'Islamic terrorism' has led to a revival of the rhetoric of the 1970s and a repetition of the deployment of a brutal, repressive security regime.

Some elements seem so familiar as to make the whole enterprise a slow-motion farce. In a bid to 'control' a worsening law and order situation, the government created the paramilitary group Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). With its black uniforms, bandanas, sunglasses and machine guns, RAB seems the epitome of a modern, weaponised, thug force. From *Rokkhi Bahini* to RAB ; 30 years have brought a change in acronyms, but the tactics remain the same. The RAB has become infamous for executing 'criminals' in what is always described as "crossfire" ; today no Bangladeshi newspaper will print that term without inserting quotation marks. A long-planned surveillance act that allows security agencies power to spy on phone calls and e-mails was passed in the New Year. Bearded men are targets again on the streets ; only this time, no one mistakes them for Guevara or Castro. Now, every beard is a potential Bin Laden, Zawahiri, or Zarqawi.

A leaflet produced for Sikder's death anniversary in 2006 called for remembering his legacy and opposing "Islamic militant" suicide bombers. Of course Bangladeshis want the new bomb attacks to stop. But the juxtaposition with the Sharbahara party brings up troubling questions. The Sharbahara Party also launched bomb attacks in its heyday, but no one is worried about them today. In some ways that phase is old history ; mummified, sanctified and safe. Obviously, there are many differences between the two historical moments and movements. The goals of a Maoist insurgency may be poles apart from the Islamists. The two movements were implacable enemies then and now (in fact, the JMB's shadowy leader Bangla Bhai got his start with campaigns against groups that operate today under the name of Sharbahara). But on a larger level, the wholesale demonisation of all Islamist movements could lead to a repetition of the 1970s conflagrations as well.

Biodiversity activist and philosopher Farhad Mazhar recently found himself in a hornet's nest of controversy when he said during a lecture: In 1971, I fought with a gun in my hand, was I a terrorist? We fought in 1952, in 1969. But at that time, many people called us terrorists. Pakistan government called us terrorists. Now we glorify those same people as freedom fighters. The basis for that action was damage. The victims were [our] people²⁸.

In spite of Mazhar's attempts to contextualise and unpack "Islamist terrorism", the comments were widely misunderstood as endorsing Islamist militancy. The ensuing press fracas, protest rallies and effigy burnings decisively established that philosophical debates over terminologies of power and conflict were not to be tolerated in crisis times.

Soon afterwards, government officials ignited this debate further. During a press conference about anti-terror training, the country's top police official proudly told reporters: The police are dedicated to their duties and trying to arrest the bombers and their bosses. They are also alert against possible attacks on them while on duty. They will watch out for anyone approaching them and act accordingly. They will also be given bulletproof vests, sophisticated weapons and necessary briefing on how to cope with suicide attacks. They have the experience of facing off Siraj Sikder, founder of Maoist outfit Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party and *Gono Bahini* ²⁹.

These police statements provoked an angry response from an unexpected quarter ; Shuvro and Shikha, the two children of Shiraj Sikder. The family arranged a huge press conference in response, where the police official's comments were strongly condemned. The Sharbahara Party was briefly back in the headlines, if only to establish that it had provided no ideological or tactical inspiration to Islamist militants. Inspired by the UN investigation of the assassination of Lebanese premier Rafik Hariri, some now express interest in bringing the case of Sikder's murder to the UN Special Tribunal. Whether such a 'cold' case would gain traction is doubtful (the problem of unreliable and invisible witnesses is scattered through every text related to the killing), but the timing of such moves can always be a source of embarrassment for the Awami League.

Shiraj Sikder's people's war is over, but struggles over the meaning of his movement, words, actions, contradictions and, finally, his death, continue to shadow Bangladesh. A younger generation often expresses frustration over 'stale' history, but without adequate

exploration, these debates will continue to play out in newspaper editorials, speeches, international fora, oral histories and an ongoing process of mythologising. Perhaps myth-making is a necessary pre-condition to get to its inevitable opposite ; demythologisation. The latter would be a healthy trend in any project that explores the hidden history of underground guerrilla movements in Bangladesh.

NOTES

1. Official estimates are in the range of 3 million, but there is some debate over the feasibility of such a high death toll without the existence of centralised death camps. I have chosen the more moderate estimates.
 2. Historically exaggerated by Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in her post-9/11 diatribe *The Rage and the Pride*: "To make you cry I'll tell you about the twelve young impure men I saw executed at Dacca at the end of the Bangladesh war. They executed them on the field of Dacca stadium, with bayonet blows to the torso or abdomen, in the presence of twenty thousand faithful who applauded in the name of God from the bleachers. They thundered "Allah-akbar, Allah-akbar"⁸ at the conclusion of the slaughter, the twenty thousand faithful (many of whom were women) left the bleachers and went down on the field. Not as a disorganised mob, no. In an orderly manner, with solemnity. They slowly formed a line and, again in the name of God, walked over the cadavers. All the while thundering Allah-akbar, Allah-akbar. They destroyed them like the Twin Towers of New York. They reduced them to a bleeding carpet of smashed bones" (*La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio*, 2002).
- Besides the sheer psychosis of most of Fallaci's recent text, there is also clear fabrication of the "Allah-akbar" chant, an unlikely coda to a liberation war that had, at least temporarily, obliterated the idea of an Islamic Pakistan. It is possible that in her dotage she has mixed this up with scenes from the Iranian revolution.
3. Parallels to an Agamben-like "State of Exception" during a "War on Terror" are obvious.
 4. Humayun Azad. *Amra ki Ey Bangladesh Cheyechilam* (Is This The Bangladesh We Wanted) (Agamee Prakashani, 2003, Dhaka).
 5. Tariq Ali. *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power* (Jonathan Cape, 1970)
 6. In a December 2005 interview with the author, ex-Sharbahara Raisuddin Ariff claims that among the flag's co-creators was party member and non-Bengali Saifullah Azmi; if this is true, it is an awkward sidenote for the Bengali nationalist project.
 7. *Purbo Bangla'r Stromik Andolon'er Thesis* (Thesis of the East Bengal Worker's Movement), adopted by East Bengal Worker's Movement Revolutionary Council on 8 January 1968, and further revised on 1 December 1968.
 8. There is some debate as to whether the Pakistani buildings, rather than the American building, were their main target – as in the author's interview with another former party member, December 2005
 9. Ahmod Sofa. "Bangla Bhasha: Rajnithir Aloke (Bengali Language in a Political Light)". In *Selected Essays of Ahmod Sofa* (Student Ways, 1993).
 10. S.M.H. Khokon and S.M. Tushar. *Bangladesher Gopon Rajniti* (Secret Politics of Bangladesh) (Nuzaim Prakashani, 1996).
 11. Shiraj Sikder. *1974-er Borshakalin Rononoithik Akromoner Ogrogothi* (Wet Season Guerilla Warfare Progress Report) (Sfulung No. 1, September 1974).

12. Raisuddin Ariff. *Underground Jibon* (Underground Life), Vol. 2 (Pathak Shamabesh, 1995, Dhaka).
13. *Kormisholpotha o tha Shomadhaner Kothipoi Upai* (Lack of Workers and Several Solutions), Resolution from 7th full meeting of the Central Committee. Source: Shuvro Sikder.
14. "Purbo Banglar Nipiritho Jonogoner Uddeshhye (To The Oppressed Masses of East Bengal)", December 1974. Leaflet from collection of Shuvro Sikder
15. Sheikh Mujib. *7i March-er Bhashon* (Speech, 7 March 1971).
16. *Purbo Banglar Nipiritho Jonogoner Uddeshhye* op. cit.
17. Afsan Chowdhury. "Dhaka in the '70s". In HIMAL magazine, August 2001. (
18. S.M.H. Khokhon and S.M. Tushar, op. cit.
19. Bilayet Hossain. Parentheses, Footnotes & Historyf, newagebd.com/2005/feb/23/fb.html
20. Raisuddin Ariff, op. cit.
21. There is a parallel with former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's sudden interest in culpability for the 1971 breakup of Pakistan, since the involvement of Zulfikar Bhutto would embarrass his main political rival, Benazir Bhutto.
22. Humayun Azad, op. cit.
23. Afsan Chowdhury, op. cit.
24. All quotes from Khokhon and Tushar, op. cit.
25. Whether imaginary or not, it is interesting that this penultimate confrontation is imagined to be in English. In a different context, Humayun Azad (op. cit., p. 61) talked about the power of English: "After Mujib took full dictatorial powers, there was a dramatic increase in use of English words in his parliament speeches and in front of officials. Perhaps this increase in English shows that he had drifted far away from his people". Ahmod Sofa (op. cit., p. 37) hits a closer note while talking about attempts to introduce Bengali in government functions: "The Minister secretly cannot deny the power of that English language. After all, he is also a Bengali like us. Bengali cannot be used successfully to scold your employees".
26. Raisuddin Ariff. *Underground Jibon* (Underground Life), Vol. 1, (Muhammad Munirul Alam, 1991, Dhaka).
27. . *Underground Jibon*, Vol. 3, (Pathak Shamabesh, 1998, Dhaka).
28. "Ederke Criminal Bolle Dekha Jabe Amra Criminal Chilam Amra Political Na (If We Call Them Criminals, We Will Have to Conclude, We Were also Criminals, not Political)". Transcript of speech given by Farhad Mazhar, *Amader Shomoi*, 12 September 2005. This transcript is debated, and Mazhar has stated that the newspaper distorted his statements.
29. Les Communistes' archive. See lescommunistes.net

Remembering Communism: The Experience of Political Defeat

PHILIP BOUNDS

It is often claimed that one of the most important features of contemporary culture is that people no longer believe in progress. For about three centuries after the dawn of the scientific age, or so the argument goes, it was taken for granted that human beings could usher in the earthly paradise by reordering their societies in accordance with the dictates of reason. Liberalism, Hegelianism, Marxism and anarchism were just some of the ideologies that held out the prospect of universal liberation. Yet at some point in the second half of the 20th century, as the great hopes of the Enlightenment began to recede, the idea of progress suddenly came to seem either hopelessly naïve or positively dangerous. Traumatized by the Holocaust, two appalling world wars and increasing evidence of environmental despoliation (to name just a few of the distinctively modern catastrophes which have beset us over the last 60 years), men and women instinctively reverted to what one writer has called a "philosophy of imperfection"¹. Now, entering a postmodern age in which the majority of people feel trapped in a "permanent present"², the most we dare to hope for are minor improvements to our daily lot. The age of utopia is over.

It goes without saying that this gloomy vision of our recent history, expressed in its most schematic form in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979),³ is extremely oversimplified. As the recent resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism goes to show, there are still plenty of people who believe in paradise and are willing to fight for it.⁴ Nor can we be sure that the utopian impulse is fully exhausted even in the West, where a number of scientific and technological developments (ranging from genetic engineering on the one hand to cryogenics on the other) might yet serve to revive it. But there is no doubt

that the Lyotard thesis is broadly correct. There has probably been no other time in history when so many people have had to abandon their most deeply cherished political beliefs. This makes it all the more surprising that so little attention has been paid to what might be termed the psychology of dashed radical hopes. While cultural theorists have gone a long way towards describing the new postmodern or post-utopian sensibility (cynical, compulsively ironic, ignorant of history), they have done practically nothing to evoke the experience of political defeat. What does it feel like for someone to invest his faith in the so-called Enlightenment project, only to discover that his faith has been misplaced? Does he ever truly cease to believe, or is his belief merely sublimated into new forms? And how can he possibly adapt to a world without hope? These are just some of the questions that urgently need to be answered.

Nothing has illustrated the collapse of Enlightenment hopes quite as powerfully as the sudden decline of Marxism. It is still less than 20 years since large swathes of Europe, Asia and Africa were governed by regimes that claimed to be Marxist-Leninist. Today only four remain, each of them a byword for totalitarian nastiness. Most of the rest were swept aside in that extraordinary period of political turbulence that convulsed the world at the end of the 1980s, culminating in the abolition of the USSR on the last day of 1991. The response of Marxists to these cataclysmic events tells us a great deal about the fate of utopian sensibility in the modern age.⁵

There is one widespread misunderstanding that needs to be cleared up at the start. If Marxists were traumatised by the collapse of the socialist countries, it was not because they regarded them as beacons of political virtue. By the early 1980s, there was scarcely anyone who failed to recognise that the USSR and its allies were economically inefficient, politically despotic and culturally impoverished. Even if they felt obliged to conceal their views in public (and by no means all of them did), Marxists usually admitted *sotto voce* that the exorbitant dreams of 1917 were very far from coming true.⁶ Yet what they retained was a certain despairing faith in the possibility of reform. Embarrassed by the failures of 'actually existing socialism', they clung to the belief that an injection of free speech, a dose of workers' control and a more accountable system of government might one day unleash its potential. In the mid-1980s, their hopes were cruelly raised by the accession to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, whose reformist programme of *glasnost* and *perestroika* briefly threatened to transform the USSR into a civilised industrial power. What was so dismaying about the events of 1991, when Gorbachev found himself turfed out of office by the dipsomaniac free-marketeer Boris Yeltsin, was the recognition that most of the Soviet people felt no loyalty at all to their so-called 'socialist heritage'. As the ordinary citizens of Moscow or Leningrad rushed to embrace the 'utopia of the marketplace', to use the critic George Steiner's phrase, Marxists mourned the passing of the USSR not for what it had been, but for what it might have become.

At first the mourning went hand-in-hand with self-exculpation. Faced with harrowing proof that the governments of socialist countries were rotten to the core, Marxists tried hard to resist the charge that their historic commitments were merely a product of naïveté,

ignorance or power-worship. Especially interesting was the testimony of older Marxists (those born in the first three decades of the 20th century), who were now called upon to explain the fact that they had become communists in the age of Stalin. The most thought-provoking of all such testimony came from the British historian Eric Hobsbawm, still astonishingly energetic in his late eighties, who wrote and spoke with great candour about the circumstances which had drawn him to communism in the 1930s. Hobsbawm's argument was that support for the communist movement had been a perfectly rational response to what he called an "Age of Catastrophe"⁷. In Europe between the wars, or so he claimed, it was widely assumed that the "old world was doomed"⁸. Convinced that a combination of world war, economic collapse and fascist aggression had brought liberal civilisation to the brink of extinction, it seemed natural for people to give the benefit of the doubt to the self-proclaimed alternatives. Those who supported Stalin's USSR were by no means ignorant of its crimes. Every "serious left-winger" knew perfectly well that Russia was an "awful place", even if he dismissed many of the more lurid claims about it as capitalist propaganda.⁹ But what mattered in the end was the faint possibility of redemption: "in a period in which, as you might imagine, mass murder and mass suffering are absolutely universal, the chance of a new world being born in great suffering would still have been worth backing"¹⁰.

If statements such as these unnerved a lot of people, they also provided a salutary reminder of the hard moral choices that the men and women of Hobsbawm's generation had to make. Asked in one notorious interview whether the establishment of a successful socialist society might have justified the deaths of millions of people, Hobsbawm responded without a second's hesitation: "Yesf.

The urge to make excuses for past political mistakes was closely bound up with a wider exercise in historical revisionism. As the socialist countries receded into the past (and as their vast and often self-incriminating archives were opened for inspection), several Marxists tried to rescue them from what E.P. Thompson famously called the "enormous condescension of posterity"¹¹. Scarcely anyone had the temerity to claim that the USSR and its allies had been conspicuously successful. With the exception of a few unrepentant Stalinists, whose writings are of interest only as an example of political pathology,¹² everyone recognised that the "achievements" of the socialist countries were ultimately founded on oppression, cruelty and violence. What the Marxist revisionists argued was not that life under socialism had been better than we were told (on the contrary, some admitted that it had probably been worse) but rather that the Stalinist regimes had often exercised a highly progressive influence outside their own borders.

The subtlest version of the argument was once again put forward by Hobsbawm, whose *Age of Extremes* (1994) identified at least three reasons why the capitalist world had reason to be grateful for the existence of the USSR. The first was the creation of the welfare state. Simply by showing that an alternative social system was possible, or so the argument went, the USSR had forced the ruling groups throughout Europe and America to make important concessions to the workers' movement. Although the Soviet people had not themselves

benefited from their planned economy (or had not benefited to any real extent), its very existence indirectly gave rise to comprehensive social insurance, universal secondary education and free healthcare in the capitalist states. There was also the issue of the USSR's heroic role in the defeat of fascism. Having done more than any other country in the 1930s to warn the world about the menace of Hitlerism, Stalin's Russia proceeded to make by far the heaviest sacrifice in the Second World War. Something approaching 85% of all land-fighting in this war occurred on Soviet soil ; a fact which Hollywood movies and Western historians have systematically obscured.¹³ Finally, turning his attention to what he insisted on calling the "Third World", Hobsbawm pointed out that the socialist countries had played a decisive role in the struggle against imperialism. Committed to the basic Marxist proposition that "no nation which oppresses another can itself be free" (and in spite of their own dubious record in Eastern Europe), successive Soviet governments had sent massive amounts of aid to the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Although Hobsbawm's main interest was in the political benefits of the October Revolution, there were several occasions on which he raised the issue of the USSR's intellectual and cultural legacy. As he implied in *Age of Extremes*, one of Soviet communism's greatest achievements was simply the fact that it restored Marxism to a position of intellectual prominence. If the Russian communists had never come to power, or so it was claimed, Marx's ideas would probably have lost their popular appeal and become the property of a tiny minority of intellectuals on the fringes of the international left. By elevating "Marxism-Leninism" into the official ideology of one of the most important states on earth, Lenin and his followers rescued it from obscurity and forced intellectuals of all political persuasions to absorb its main ideas ; in the process equipping them with one of the subtlest and most fruitful methods for analysing human affairs. Not for nothing did John Maynard Keynes, the greatest 'bourgeois' economist of the 20th century, announce towards the end of his life that "we are all Marxists now".

Another remarkable tribute to the cultural influence of the socialist countries came from the critic George Steiner (a self-described "Platonic anarchist"),¹⁴ who regarded Marxism not simply as an important intellectual tool but as the last great expression of "Judaic-messianic idealism". According to Steiner, Marx was the direct inheritor of that coruscating strain of utopian enthusiasm that had inspired the Old Testament prophets. By keeping alive the idea that men and women are greater than they have ever realised (and by striving so tirelessly to bring high culture to the attention of ordinary people), the socialist countries breathed life into the utopian impulse at a time when it was being snuffed out everywhere else. When they finally collapsed, the life of the mind suffered a heavy blow:

The variant on Judaic-messianic idealism, on the prophetic vision of a kingdom of justice on earth, which we call Marxism, brought intolerable bestiality, suffering and practical failure to hundreds of millions of men and women. The lifting of that yoke is cause for utter gratitude and relief. But the source of the hideous misprision is not ignoble (as was that of Nazi racism): it lies in a terrible over-estimate of man's

capacities for altruism, for purity, for intellectual-philosophic sustenance. The theatres in East Berlin performed the classics when heavy metal and American musicals were wanted. The bookstores displayed Lessing and Goethe and Tolstoy, but Archer and Collins were dreamed of. The present collapse of Marxist-Leninist despotisms marks the vengeful termination of a compliment to man - probably illusory - but positive none the less.¹⁵

All of which brings us to the crucial issue. Having squared their consciences with the grim realities of recent history (and having convinced themselves that the 'socialist experiment' was not entirely a waste of time), to what extent have Marxists been able to sustain their faith in Marxism? There is no simple answer to that question. At one extreme there has clearly been a haemorrhaging of the revolutionary left over the last 20 years. Thousands of people for whom Marxism was once a ruling passion have torn up their party cards, made their peace with the market and rued their youthful infatuation with the siren voices of utopia. These are precisely the sort of people to whom the postmodern theorists have drawn our attention ; disillusioned, apolitical, despairing of human nature.

At the opposite extreme, even in countries where Stalinism did its worst, there is still a substantial core of loyalists who insist (or pray) that socialism's moment has not yet passed. Chastened by their failure to perform the "vanguard" role which Lenin assigned to them, Marxist parties still make an important and largely beneficial contribution to local and national governments in countries as disparate as India, Germany, France and Iraq. Some have even adapted themselves to the emergence of the so-called anti-globalisation movement, supplying an element of theoretical rigour and organisational skill which younger activists have not yet developed. The world is a better place as a result of it.

Yet the truly interesting people are neither the believers nor the disbelievers (the stubborn revolutionaries and the cynical reactionaries, so to speak) but those who come somewhere in the middle ; the scores of men and women who retain a yearning for Enlightenment values but no longer call themselves Marxists. The most poignant representatives of this group are those who wallow in a spirit of remembered political passion. Their defining characteristic is a sort of bittersweet yearning for the political certainties of their youth, combined with the melancholic realisation that they can never be recaptured. Like William Wordsworth in early middle age (tearfully affirming that "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive" even as his faith in the French Revolution crumbled), they can be moved beyond reason by the memory of a strike, an eloquent speech or a long-forgotten comrade, only to find themselves snapped back to reality by the high winds of postmodern cynicism.

There is an extremely affecting example of all this in Wolf Biermann's great essay "Shaking Hands with the *Zeitgeist*" (1992), which describes what happened when Biermann was introduced to Mikhail Gorbachev at a reception in Hamburg in the early 1990s. In spite of the fact that he had not called himself a Marxist in many years (not least because the ruling Socialist Unity Party had expelled him from East Germany for dissident activities), Biermann could only think of one thing to say when Gorbachev stood before him: "I am a

Communist". For some moments an electric current of political nostalgia passed between the two men, enough to induce a "romantic revolutionary spasm" in both their bodies. But Biermann's whole point was that the mood could not last. As Gorbachev shook his hand, "he squeezed meaningfully and tragically, communicating what we both know very well: it doesn't matter any more"¹⁶. For anyone who fell under the spell of the Marxist left and lived to see the socialist countries collapse, there is something almost painfully moving about the last two sentences of Biermann's essay: "So we stood there, two survivors by the open grave of a fixed idea. Then we went on our way"¹⁷.

But it would be wrong to end on such an agonistic note. Chronic nostalgics like Biermann should not simply be dismissed as the casualties of a shattered utopian dream. In a curious way, even as they reconcile themselves to a life without political hope, they continue to resist some of the modern world's most disabling illusions. As has often been pointed out, not least by the great Marxist critic John Berger, nothing has been a greater source of psychological anguish over the last two centuries than our strictly linear conception of time. At some point in the early 19th century, largely because of the rapid and cataclysmic changes which industrial capitalism brought in its wake, men and women began to behave as if time consists of a series of discrete moments which disappear forever as soon as they pass. The prevailing assumption is that all of us have been liberated from the enormous weight of history; and that each set of circumstances is eventually cancelled out by the events that succeed it, leaving no traces in the sands of time. However, as Berger has repeatedly argued, this unquestioned emphasis on linearity leaves far too much out. By emphasising the pristine newness of every moment we experience, we have begun to lose the sense that the human personality is defined as much by "ineluctable" and "continuous" events and dispositions as by the realities of social change. Blinded by neophilia, we compromise our understanding of "birth, sexual attraction, social cooperation, death"¹⁸.

Moreover, there is an obvious sense in which the modern idea of time deprives us of the crucial experience of "timelessness". If human beings are to enjoy any measure of happiness, or so Berger implied, they must somehow believe that their most important experiences, values and relationships are destined to last. No one can thrive on the assumption that every change of circumstances casts him adrift from his past. The great problem with the modern age is that it has no language in which to talk of such things:

The 19th-century discovery of history as the terrain of human freedom^a deposited the continuous within the flow of history ; i.e., the continuous was that which had a longer duration than the ephemeral. Previously, the continuous was thought of as the unchanging or timeless existing outside the flow of history.¹⁹

The virtue of the post-Marxist nostalgics is that their whole way of life is an affront to linearity. Nearly all of them seem to live in two periods of history at the same time. Acutely aware of the bleakness of the modern age, the very texture of their experience seems to hark back to a lost world ; a world of endless meetings in draughty halls, intensive study

of dog-eared 'Marxist classics', impassioned conversations in city streets, awestruck obeisance before the power of the working class.²⁰ It is impossible to read a page of their work without experiencing the past as a living force, reaching down into the present and providing a residue of remembered hope. Even as they withdraw from politics and retreat into their memories, men like Biermann remind us of the overwhelming power of our revolutionary traditions. It is an irony which Marx himself would surely have appreciated.

The writer thanks Neville Bounds, Megan Bounds, Daisy Hasan and Professor Noorul Hasan for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

NOTES

1. Noël O' Sullivan. *Conservatism* (J.M. Dent, 1976, London), p. 9.
2. A number of commentators on the so-called "postmodern condition" have argued that contemporary culture is characterised by a weakening sense of history. See, for instance, Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso, 1992, London).
3. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester University Press, 1984, Manchester).
4. For the argument that Islamic fundamentalism is a distinctively *modern* phenomenon, not a throwback to the pre-modern age, see John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What It Means to Be Modern* (Faber and Faber, 2004, London).
5. There is obviously no space in a short article such as this to examine all the ways in which Marxists responded to the collapse of the socialist countries. I have simply tried to identify some of the most important trends in the hope of stimulating further research.
6. It needs to be remembered that Marxists disagreed violently amongst themselves throughout the period under review. Those who belonged to the so-called 'world communist movement' were officially aligned with the socialist countries, though very few had many illusions left by the time those countries collapsed. Moreover, the world communist movement was divided from the early 1960s onwards between its pro-Soviet wing, exemplified by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and its pro-China or Maoist wing, exemplified by the Communist Party of India. Members of the 'Trotskyist' movement were defined by their hostility to the socialist countries, dismissing them as 'degenerated workers' states' or even as 'state capitalist'. This article is primarily about the attitudes of individual members of the world communist movement.
7. "The Age of Catastrophe" was the title which Hobsbawm conferred on the period between 1914 and 1945. See *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (Michael Joseph, 1994, London).
8. Eric Hobsbawm. *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (Allen Lane, 2002, London), p. 137.
9. These quotations are taken from a 1994 television interview with Hobsbawm, conducted by Michael Ignatieff and broadcast in Britain on BBC 2.
10. *Ibid.*
11. E.P. Thompson. *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1972, Harmondsworth), p. 13.
12. See, for instance, Ludo Martens, *Another View of Stalin* (EPO, 1994, Antwerp). The complete English text can be accessed at <http://www.plp.org/books/Stalin/book.html>.

13. Hobsbawm does not quote this statistic in *Age of Extremes*. I am grateful to Robert Griffiths, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), for drawing it to my attention.
14. Steiner is not of course a Marxist; but in the area of cultural criticism (though not anywhere else) there is case for describing him as a species of fellow traveller. For a selection of Steiner's writings on the cultural importance of Marxism, see the section entitled "Marxism and the Literary Critic" in his *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (Faber and Faber, 1990, London).
15. George Steiner. Contribution to "The State of Europe: Christmas Eve, 1989". In *Granta 30: New Europe!* Winter 1990, pp. 130-31.
16. Wolf Biermann. "Shaking Hands with the *Zeitgeist*". In *Granta 42: Krauts!* Winter 1992, p. 159.
17. *Ibid*, p. 161.
18. John Berger. "Painting and Time". In (ed.) Lloyd Spencer, *The White Bird* (The Hogarth Press, 1988, London), p. 209.
19. *Ibid*.
20. The outlook of the post-Marxist nostalgics was well captured by a former colleague of mine who told me that the German Democratic Republic is not dead because "it still exists in people's minds".



The Dynamic Balkans: A Working Model for the EU?

Interview with Kyong Park and Marjetica Potrc

NATAŠA PETREŠIN



In the winter of 2004-05, Marjetica Potrc, a Ljubljana-based artist and architect, and Kyong Park, an artist and architect who divides his time between New York and the Balkans, embarked on a journey through the cities of the Western Balkans. After a month of travels, which included meetings with local cultural and social workers as well as lectures and presentations by both artists, they developed the idea of creating and co-curating an internationally based interdisciplinary research project, which they called *Europe Lost and Found*. This three-year initiative seeks to articulate and imagine the current state and future evolution of Europe's new and shifting borders and territories. Its subject is a continent characterised by a changing demographics - low birth rates, an aging population, and rising immigration - and the need for redefining states, sovereignties, and citizenships. The project aims to challenge the established beliefs and practices of the nation state, as well as the non-representative and technocratic construction of the European Union, and to envision more open, alternative ways to discuss populations in movement.

The first phase of the project, *Lost Highway Expedition **, begins in Ljubljana in the summer of 2006.



Nata a Petre in: There is today an increasing awareness, and much concern, about the changing geo-political map of Europe. This relates not only to the European Union's politics of inclusion and exclusion, but also to issues surrounding its expanding and shrinking cities. Both of you have travelled a great deal around Europe as part of your research into contemporary urban life, but recently, this research has been focused on the rather elusive region of South-eastern Europe, which is better known as the Balkans. What led up to the trip you made together a year ago to the states of the former Yugoslavia, and how would you compare the expectations you had at the beginning of the trip with what you actually experienced?

Kyong Park: Our travel, or rather urban exploration, was in the Western Balkans - a new popular designation for the region that comprises the former Yugoslavia and Albania. Like "South-eastern Europe" and "the Balkans", these terms come from outside, as internationally conceded and politically formulated territorial definitions. The new terms seem benign, but such non-politicised geographic words cover up the violence of the current colonisation of these territories.

Maybe we should call this process a *re-colonisation*, because the recent economic success of Austria is very connected to this region through the expansion here of Austrian banks, insurance companies and supermarkets since the Balkan wars of the 1990s. And because most Western Balkan cities, even Sarajevo, have a great deal of Austrian-inspired or -imposed elements in their urban, architectural, and cultural heritage from the time of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire, these artifacts provide a historical background, and even a false legitimacy, for the neo-colonial paradigm.

So it seems the historical dividing-up of the Balkans between empires, in terms of culture, religion, and history, is a re-run, from the Habsburg-Ottoman division to current divisions between modern and primitive (not to imply that the EU is modern and the Western Balkans is primitive); also between urban and rural, secular and fundamentalist, informal and formal (in states and economies), forever more.

But we should remember that, since the First World War, and even more since the Second World War, this region, especially in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, had almost a century in self-determining its own history, one that is decisively modern and Western. So this trip, for me, was like a magical exploration of political and social chameleons. And as you move from one landscape to another, you move from one 'political-scape' to another, and usually more than one, often through different times and, of course, all in the midst of transformation.

The systems of the Western Balkans are hybrid, parallel, and pixelised, or balkanised. To be sure, the region shares similar transitional events with other former socialist and communist territories, but we should be careful not to fuse all these into a single transition from communism to capitalism. The transition is different and distinctive for each location, and this fact is dramatically obvious in post-Yugoslavia. One reason stems from Yugoslavia having been an important node for the global non-aligned movement, straddling the polarity of the Cold War. In my limited knowledge, the Western Balkans is unique because it was an alternative model to the great modernist and utopian political experiments of the last century, which encompassed the globe.

There were many purposes behind our trip, some unconscious and others purely intuitive. Yet this blind journey increasingly became a search for an alternative to the unilateral domination of the globe by capitalism. By the end, we felt we wanted to continue this search with projects like *Europe Lost and Found* and *Lost Highway Expedition*.

Marjetica Potrc: It's true what Kyong said ; the names for the Western Balkan region have changed several times in recent years. Every now and then you have to look for the politically correct name. This tells us several things: clearly, the borders have changed since the former Yugoslavia disintegrated, creating pixelised territories that are fiercely independent, so that the gravitational pull of the parts toward a bigger picture, such as the EU, continues to be balanced. It's here that Kyong implicates neo-colonisation.

Maybe most important is the fact that the Western Balkans is an incredibly dynamic region. It accepts the state of transition as a working model and a core gain. To make a long story short, we saw the future of the European Union being played out in the cities of the Western Balkans.

NP: How do you see this politics of neo-colonisation from the EU, and that of self-colonisation on the part of the Western Balkans ; by which I mean 'colonising' your own authentic nature

by importing foreign values and models, a process discussed by the cultural historian Alexander Kiossev ; taking place in the region? How important is a region's self-definition of its own historical and social structures for the cultural circles you encountered?

KP: Some of my initial thoughts on neo-colonisation by the EU of non-Western-European territories, I have already mentioned briefly. But in strange ways, the founding principle of the EU, the idea of fostering economic collaboration between different nation states in order to avoid starting another global war, has become a primary means for the neo-colonisation of peripheral territories.

Yes, it is true that a continental-scaled war has been prevented for half a century, but instead, as the theorists Hardt and Negri describe it, there has developed a perpetual war of a different kind, which has political extensions in the domains of economics and culture. Wars still take place; they are just different now.

Under the EU, all regions are supposed to comply with its paternalistic standardisation of laws, economic policies, banking rules, etc., including culture. There is some resistance to a programme that benefits its more powerful and founding members, but the promises of economic prosperity and a stronger civil society are too attractive to be rejected by the periphery. The sovereignty of the peripheral states is then eroded in the administrative regulation by the EU, which is a non-representative and distant entity, as can be seen in the recent rejection of the constitution, which, by the way, happened within the core of the EU, not in the peripheral territories. At the EU's core, a fundamental resistance is emerging to non-representative governance.

So you have to consider that the EU is actually much more successful, at least politically, in its periphery, where the nations that want to join are fundamentally less representative anyway. And in such cases as Serbia and other Western Balkan states, it is generally true that all the political parties, whether left or right, nationalist or oppositional, support joining the EU, despite the loss of their own self-authority. The populace sees the EU as their only chance to get rid of all the current parties and states, some would say. For them, the EU is their best chance to modernise the state and do away with corruption. The EU is a kind of 'bad medicine' for them all.

MP: During the 1990s, the Western Balkans went into rapid collapse. At the time, the region was extensively analysed and commented upon. Afterwards, interest in the region vanished. As if it was just standing still. But it was not standing still; indeed, it was on fast-forward. Today, the region is restructuring itself as a conglomeration of distinct and highly inventive societies that do not compete with each other but rather exist in parallel.

Cities such as Belgrade, Prishtina and Tirana not only attest to the dissolution of the social state, they also show the prevalence of derelict modernist architecture and degraded public space. What they also put forward, blatantly, are strategies that other European cities approach only timidly, such as a new emphasis on privacy, security, and locally based solutions, as well as a preference for small-scale growth.

The facts on the ground of Western Balkan cities are clear. On the one hand, you see a new society in the making; on the other, the colossal collapse of modernism. All of this is recorded in the architecture. Cities read like an open book.

While no one in the Western Balkans is looking back to modernism, the EU is only now digesting its collapse. Think of the French riots by disaffected youths from immigrant families that occurred in the autumn of 2005, first in the Paris suburbs and then all across France. During the last half-century, both Western and Eastern Europe embraced modernist architecture and the modernist ideals of the social state under the slogan "equality and justice for all". While modernism functions from the top down and thinks in large-scale terms, the cities and regions of the Western Balkans today celebrate ; and are the product of - bottom-up initiatives, fragmentation, adaptability, and an emphasis on the local. As the recent rejection of the EU constitution by French and Dutch voters proves, EU citizens wish to live in a more localised European Union; similarly, the EU explores a paradigm in which the regional serves as a counterbalance to the nation state. An emphasis on the local means that more decisions are taken on the local level; bottom-up initiatives increase, and state and local institutions become more adaptable. Fragmentation and parallelism, which I call "Balkan strategies", are in fact already EU strategies.

In contrast to the United States, which is a more or less consolidated territory with a strong centralised government, Europe is a dynamic territory made up of several parallel governing bodies that define different entities: there is a Schengen Europe, a tax Europe, an EU-membership Europe, a NATO Europe, and so on. Which reminds me of Kosovo. There, the official currency is the euro; and Kosovo is run by three parallel governments: the Kosovar, the Serbian, and the UN administrations.

As a geopolitical entity, Europe is constantly expanding. Within its boundaries, the consequences of the slow dissolution of the social state and the ideology of multiculturalism can be seen in territories consolidated around ethnic or other kinds of communities. The state of 'transition' is accepted as a working model, and there is a civil society in the making that is quite different from that of modernism. I live in Slovenia, which is now a part of the EU. Clearly, my country will never have the same rights and obligations as the founding EU states. Slovenes are equal, but differently so.

NP: How did the wars of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, which led to dynamic changes in city and state borders, and to the end of severe communist oppression in Albania, affect the landscape and the cityscape? More specifically, how were they affected by the aftermath of the wars? On which layers of visibility (in the architecture and urban planning of the major cities, in social and political structures) are these events played out?

MP: The economic and social changes, both during and after the wars in the 1990s, were major factors. Sarajevo was bombed, and parts of the city were physically destroyed. Belgrade, Prishtina and Tirana were invaded by settlers from rural areas and small cities. There were huge population shifts. Migrants in the Western Balkans are a reminder that it

is citizens with their aspirations who build societies in the first place, without necessarily planning to.

My impression in Sarajevo was that it is still dependent on donor money, on gifts from the EU and Islamic countries, and this can be seen on its face. Belgrade has turned a blind eye to the population influx, leaving settlers to solve their housing problems themselves. Today, Belgrade has the biggest informal city in the region. Tirana's skyline has completely changed over the past ten years. Cities doubled in size, expanding into the suburbs; new cities were laid on top of existing ones. I call these 'parallel cities', because they do not destroy what was there before, but instead re-use it one step at a time and in a new way. No planning in advance here. You build first and worry about infrastructure later.

All in all, no past is lamented and no vision of the future is in place. Parallel cities do not go against the past, they add to what was there before. The present is celebrated and embodied in sometimes-heroic constructions. There is tremendous confidence in the present. Individual homes parade kitschy façades. There is no tendency toward any restraint by a single style. A multiplicity of styles, such as orientalism, modernism and historicism, coexist side by side and express the personal taste of the owner. Individual existence is celebrated here.

The informal economy gives the region its major thrust. In Tirana, the construction industry is still the biggest economy. It used to operate almost entirely as part of the informal economy not long ago. What is most fantastic is that negotiations between the informal city and formal institutions seem to work well in Tirana. The mayor went on public TV to discuss with representatives of the informal city how to provide an infrastructure for them, and they all took decisions together.

What can be learned from parallel systems is that they can work side by side. The informal city and the formal city are one city: we the citizens build the city and society together. In the Western Balkans, parallel cities, parallel economies, and parallel governance all prosper.

In every city, from Ljubljana to Zagreb to Tirana, one of the gains from the economic and political restructuring is the flourishing of small-scale organisations. These are mostly individually based, bottom-up initiatives. They are the cells of the new citizenship. They generate new connections. I was in Zagreb in November 2005, and heard that the cultural non-profit organisations that sprouted in recent years are today more powerful than state-run organisations. NGOs operate in parallel to government institutions, and privately operated minibuses often replace the state transit system. Prishtina is again a great case study with its parallel governments ; Serbian, Kosovar, and UN ; and its parallel cities, with foreign residents living in segregated enclaves.

Speaking of the gains of thinking on the small scale: a new residential architectural typology is the urban villa, a residential community of about ten families. To make sense of living together is to go small scale. Remember, in modernism, a residential community usually meant some 10,000 people. That's shrinkage for you.

KP: The only thing I could add to Marjetica's comments would be to indicate the presence of pluralism, even in homogeneous territories, which the Western Balkans are, at least racially. In fact, the EU is too. And compared to racially very diverse regions like the Americas, the nation-states of post-World War II Europe are very homogeneous. But still it is possible; and it is a reality that conflicts between territories in terms of culture, economics and religion are as important, and can be just as violent, as those fuelled by race definitions alone.

This is especially poignant for the future of the EU, and of Europe, because it will become increasingly racially diverse due to its aging and shrinking populations. This is simply unavoidable. The rise of nationalism and regionalism shows this already. And the pain of un-negotiated nationalism and regionalism has already shaken the Western Balkans, and it can also happen in the EU.

NP: Regarding the constant adaptation and change that continue to occur in this region, what are the various political and cultural strategies coming from the respective cities ; what Marjetica calls "Balkan strategies" ; that you could formulate, based on your research?

MP: Parallelism is definitely one major example of a "Balkan strategy". Another is fragmentation. As Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, a New York-based Serbian architect and theoretician, says, fragmentation is a source of fear and instability in the EU, but in the Western Balkans it is normal. 'Balkanisation' used to be considered a negative term, a synonym for the break-up of unity. But it has recently been rethought. It can be understood as a counteraction to globalisation. By giving power to particles and group identities, it becomes a potential force for democracy. More than anything, balkanisation is a source of difference. Fragmentary and decentralising tendencies lead to the pixelisation of society, greater local adaptability, and parallel states of existence.

NP: When you talk about balkanisation as a force of fragmentation, where do you see it taking place outside the region we are talking about?

KP: The proliferation of symbolic minefields could be an example, as can be seen through the documentation and writings of the Bosnian architect/artist Azra Aksamija, who currently lives in the US. She studies the construction of hundreds of new churches and mosques in Bosnia, which, according to her, continues to carve up the divided territories of the Federation of Bosniaks and Croats and the Republic of Srpska. This process selectively reconstructs histories to best suit the present needs of various identities, and thus embeds future conflicts that will break out in these territories at a later time.

And once again, architecture becomes the battleground of cultural warfare ; now, during the time of its construction; previously, through its destruction, such as the documentation of the urbicide of Sarajevo in the exhibition *Wararchitecture* that was exhibited at the StoreFront for Art and Architecture in New York in 1995, and in many other

places. So the pixelisation of Europe has begun in the Western Balkans, which is something the EU should prepare for.

MP: An interesting analogy exists with the current situation in the Netherlands, where the social state is in slow but steady decline. What was once "multicultural Holland" is now moving away from multiculturalism toward a society with ethnically and economically defined consolidated territories. Current trends show a migration of the ethnic Dutch population from urban to rural areas. The cities, which are now labelled dangerous, are becoming negotiated territories between the remaining native population and the populations of immigrants. By 2100, the ethnic Dutch are expected to be a minority within the current boundaries of the Netherlands. The concerns of the larger society are mirrored on a personal level by middle-class residents who, in pursuit of their own consolidated territories, are moving out of the cities into gated communities with clearly defined borders. Haverleij, a recent Vinex development in a rural area about 100 kilometres from Rotterdam, presents a good example.

NP: How is it possible to not be a victim or casualty of the EU's top-down policies and their strategic exports, which seem to echo cultural imperialism, and to maintain some kind of dignified coherence in regard to a country's own history and the present state of affairs?

KP: The answer probably lies in balkanisation: the acceptance of all forms of existence, not just one like the EU. Supposedly there are other options, but they are essentially indistinguishable from one other, like the fusion of political lefts and rights, as in the merging of communism with capitalism, or of leftists and nationalists. Nothing is clear anymore. They are all hybrids and run in parallel at the same time. The only thing left for the globe may be to take its cue from the Western Balkans and start pixelising. And this is the battle of the future, between the notion of empire and individuals, which the Western Balkans has already begun; and once again, the EU should take note.

MP: You might wonder what happened to the modernist vision of "equality and justice for all". In Prishtina, people say that no one really governs there, so individuals have become the smallest state. But are they citizens? Are they a society? Can we learn from the citizens of Prishtina?

Upon our arrival in Tirana, Kyong and I met with Edi Muka, the curator of the National Gallery of Art there. We talked about Prishtina. He said he was familiar with what we described. He said that Tirana has been there before, but now his city is ahead of Prishtina. Both cities have experienced a collapse of public values. In Tirana, they have come firmly back. Tirana showcases a new kind of democracy.

You can say that Tirana is the 'fastest' of all the cities in the Western Balkans. If so, what can the EU's 'slow' cities learn from Tirana? Is it possible to construct a better life, one that is non-utopian and without ideological illusions? This is what Lost Highway Expedition will

try to find out. With the help of a large group of architects, artists and other contributors, it will be considering the future of the EU ; one of its missions is to look for possible models for EU society.

Marjetica Potrc is a Ljubljana-based artist and architect whose work has been featured in exhibitions and as solo shows throughout Europe and the Americas. Kyong Park is a curator and artist, and a founding member of the International Centre for Urban Ecology in Detroit and Centrala Stichting voor Toekomstige Steden in Rotterdam.

* Lost Highway Expedition (LHE) is the first event of *Europe Lost and Found* (ELF), an interdisciplinary and multi-national participatory research project that imagines decentralised and fragmented forms of the economic, political and cultural geographies of future Europe. This movement of artists, architects and other practitioners will navigate the unstable territoriality of the Western Balkans, envisioning a decentred, non-hierarchical, informal, bottom-up, self-generating, open source network society.

The project asks how political and cultural borders can become a creative space in which differences are both fundamental and irrelevant; how the spatial instruments emerging from the new architectural and urban landscapes of the Western Balkans can improve Europe, especially the European Union; how the assumed dichotomies between nomadic and sedentary societies can become a constructive parallax; and how the distant views of the outsider can mingle with the intimate experience of an insider, to give a more complete and objective measure of Europe/the Western Balkans.

From 30 July - 26 August 2006, LHE's events/exhibitions will travel through Ljubljana, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Skopje, Pristina, Tirana, Podgorica and Sarajevo. This phase consists of two days of events in each city, with a day of travel in between. It includes guided tours, presentations and forums conducted by local experts, workshops between travellers and local participants, discussions, exhibitions, radio shows and picnics, as well as other possible events organised by the host cities themselves. Participants can join or leave the expedition at any point, and can construct their own paths through other cities or rural areas between cities.

The project is supported by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

www.europelostandfound.net/

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GuateMex: No-Man's-Water

MARCOS LUTYENS

On the border between Southern Mexico and Northern Guatemala runs the river Usumacinta, a liquid border legally known as a 'shared basin'. There are 58 shared basins in Latin America, and every country in Mesoamerica shares a boundary river or other significant water resource. Much attention has been given to the border between the US and Mexico, particularly the Rio Grande river, which has spawned the pejorative word *mojado*, Spanish for the derogatory term 'wetback' ; in other words, for 'illegal' immigrants to the US who have had to swim across the border. Many of these people have had to cross several shared basins on their long and arduous trip northwards to the perceived land of opportunity. They are driven by what are known, in the discourse of migration and demographics, as 'push factors', such as underdevelopment, poverty, corruption, exploitation, low wages or political strife; likewise, 'pull factors' lure migrants towards more prosperous terrain with a promise of higher standards of living.¹

The immigrant trajectory northwards runs perpendicular to these rivers, transforming the flowing water into a succession of natural barriers. This was not always the case, as originally the Usumacinta river was one of the main trading routes for the Mayans. It is still used to transport *chicle* (the gum obtained from the latex of the sapodilla tree; also known as *oro blanco*, 'white gold') and logs downstream. But for the contemporary immigrant, the river is a formidable obstacle, draining 42% of Guatemala, with an annual discharge of 105,200 million cubic metres into the Gulf of Mexico.²

The area of this shared basin is among the poorest in Guatemala and Mexico. The Peten, Guatemala's northernmost district, was until recently a centre for armed conflict between

guerrillas and government troops. Even now, certain areas of the bordering Lacandon forest are held by a group of freedom fighters known as the Zapatistas, following their 1994 uprising which aimed at shoring up the eroded rights of the local indigenous Mayan population. Mayans make up 60% of the Guatemalan population, and constitute the majority of immigrants who head north across the river. However, immigrants from El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, who over the years have been affected by a variety of problems (including drought, earthquakes and social revolution), significantly increase the flow.

Thus, the region has become a volatile transit zone, unofficially known as the 'Rear Guard' in the US-backed fight against illegal immigration. Other than the 250,000 or so 'illegal aliens' (as these immigrants are known in the US) who attempt to enter that country from Central America each year, this area is also the western terminus for the annual immigration of approximately 100,000 immigrants from Asia.

The US response has been to endorse, or should one say enforce, the 'Southern Plan', which led to the deportation in 2001 of over 6,000 Central Americans from Mexico, back across the Usumacinta. In short, the river has been a major hurdle to immigrants on an already daunting trip, 'pushing' themselves away from hunger and being 'pulled' towards a higher standard of living.

Initiated in 2005, GuateMex is a project that aims not just to help ease the problems of crossing this specific border, but also to enable the would-be immigrant to deal with immigration goals and challenges down the line, such as better-paid jobs, and protection from the risk of being persecuted by the US Department of Homeland Security (formed post-9/11), as well as by newly formed citizen vigilante groups such as the 'Minutemen'. GuateMex is a 'raft' that attempts to counter the political and physical hurdles present at the border, through offering internet access and basic internet/computer education to immigrants on their journey. The 'raft' is a 6 metre x 4 metre structure, with a base composed of 55 gallon drums and a superstructure made with modular tent-like material that both shelters and ventilates as the need arises. Inside, there is a bank of computers hooked up to the internet. Immigrants can anonymously draw up to the docking platform, where they are then guided through simple Internet procedures and given advice about how and where to access the internet down the line.

The simple key to this process is a pragmatic sleight-of-hand that places the project in the 'no-man's-water' between the two countries. Thus, the raft becomes an autonomous zone, independent and sovereign to itself. The raft transforms the river from a hurdle into a conduit, decreasing the turbulence of human traffic created by xenophobic local resistance, political red tape and US border-patrol oppression.

The raft is an outgrowth of a relatively long tradition of clandestine or non-sanctioned broadcasting, otherwise known as 'pirate radio', that blossomed in the 1960s in Europe, particularly in the form of the offshore radio station, Radio Caroline. Other 'freebooter' broadcasts include 'border blaster' stations that transmit programmes in violation of US law across the US-Mexican border, although in this case the stations are on Mexican soil, and thus not as autonomous as those stations or hubs in international waters. Not surprisingly,

international waters have been effectively used as a propaganda tool by countries such as the US as in the case of Radio Swan, which transmitted pro-US messages to Cuba off the island of Swan, a territory disputed between the US and Honduras.

The raft itself is a powerful symbol of the plight of immigrants, being a rudimentary, precarious (and sometimes the only) way of travelling across water to reach the desired country. Most notable is the Cuban *balsero* (rafter) phenomenon, which has led to the death at sea of approximately 70,000 Cubans of all ages in the last four decades.³ However, in the case of GuateMex the raft becomes a tool of support and hope, more akin to American writer Hakim Bey's concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ).⁴

Bey describes the socio-political tactic of creating a contingent domain that eludes formal structures of control, a new territory of the moment on the boundary line of established regions. He kicks off his explanation of the TAZ by describing the social formation of the "Sea Rovers and Corsairs", who lived outside the law and set up an "information network" that spanned the globe. He then goes on to draw parallels between these societies and the potential of the Web. In effect, GuateMex bridges the romantic, literally 'offshore' notion of a completely autonomous community such as the Corsairs, and the 'autonomous zones' offered to us through the useful flow and supply of information that can be accessed through the internet.

The internet raft helps build a community among this tenuous, constantly trickling flow of immigrants who have passed through, helping to weave a wider fabric of support, as successive immigrants can inform newcomers of what lies ahead. At a more profound level, the raft becomes a vehicle that starts to give this vulnerable population a sense of group solidarity and self-awareness, which can only add to its existing strengths.

Needless to say, the internet is increasingly becoming a war zone for the advocacy and rejection of humane immigration policy. Beginning in April 2005, the Minuteman Project (co-founded by Jim Gilchrist and Chris Simcox, and self-defined on its website as "a citizen's vigilance operation monitoring immigration, business and government") has drawn thousands of Americans to the Mexico-Arizona border, to seize immigrants trying to get across into the US. On 30 May 2006, in their latest effort to block illegal crossing, a cadre of 'Minutemen' began building a 10-mile-long fence of barbed wire, razor wire and steel rails on private land in south-eastern Arizona. The estimated time for completing the fence: three weeks. The estimated cost: \$100,000.

According to Gilchrist, "aif I didn't have the internet, the Minuteman Project probably wouldn't have happened"⁵. All his volunteers are assembled and coordinated through his website. On the other side of the coin, organisations that defend the rights of immigrants are generally outgunned and outclassed by their opponents. According to human rights advocate Armando Navarro, professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, Riverside: "There is no doubt^a [the vigilantes]^a are winning the internet battle"⁶. Part of the problem is that immigrants and their supporters are generally less well off and have far less access to computers, and hence limited access to the potential for grassroots organising enabled by internet communication.

In its own particular way, GuateMex helps to introduce the benefits of the internet to those who have very little digital access; it thus begins to level the playing field between those who aim to block the flow of immigrants and the immigrants themselves. The ultimate goal of GuateMex is to place these rafts on most of the shared basins in Central and South America ; and perhaps even in other parts of the world, wherever there is a perceived need to ensure the safety and knowledge of would-be immigrants as they traverse new territories that present challenges, dangers and opportunities. These mobile rafts would thus act as an extended nervous system that transmits valuable information to people who need it for literal and psychological survival. And perhaps the rafts would also be able to provide the assurance of at least one stable link in the 'push' and 'pull' of the migrant's turbulent and changing world.

GuateMex is directed by René Hayashi and Eder Castillo, with inputs from Marcos Lutyens, Freyja Bardell and Blair Ellis.

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Paisajes

SERGIO DE LA TORRE





Paisajes (Landscapes) is a series of black-and-white photographs of the industrial landscape of over 900 *maquiladoras* ; transnational assembly plants ; in the Mexican city of Tijuana, just across the border with California.

Maquiladoras assemble filters, batteries, cassettes, flybacks and other electronic parts, Yugo automobiles, oxygen masks, clothes, toys, keyboards, household implements, etc. The first *maquiladoras* were built in the 1960s on the outskirts of Tijuana. This was initially an industrial zone, but today it is also residential, since Tijuana expands at the rate of two acres per day.

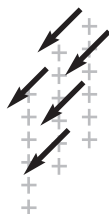
Nevertheless, the mechanisms behind the creation of such zones deny the human presence in these areas. Bulldozers, Caterpillars, earth-moving vehicles and other types of heavy machinery shape hills and valleys, lay the foundation for *maquiladoras*, and demarcate this from the space of *colonias* ; low-income settlements of makeshift

substandard housing on the periphery, without adequate infrastructure or basic services such as clean water, electricity and sanitation.

The visual result is a series of monolithic buildings cresting the hills. The structures look like monuments, imposing a memory on a city that has none.

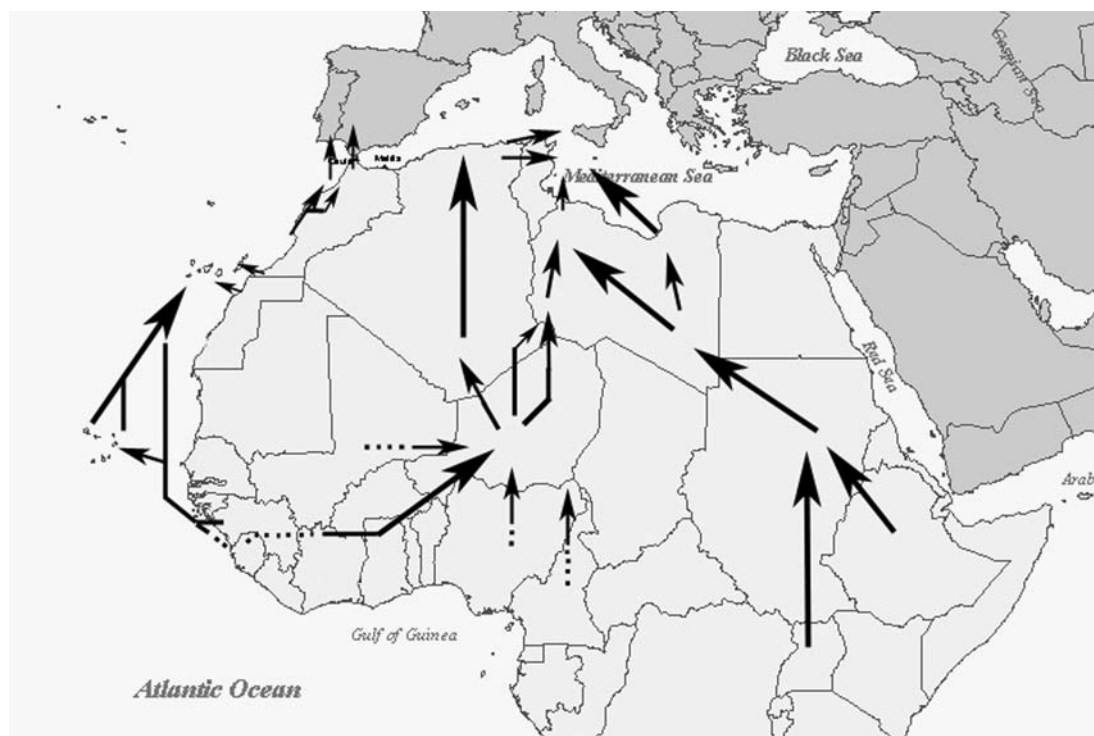
The images in this sequence, taken between 2000-2005, have been digitally altered. Some of the houses have been erased; windows, doors and fences have also been erased from the *maquiladoras*, to emphasise their sculptural aspect and to mimic the language used by those who design and construct these industrial parks.





Ceuta and Melilla Fences: A Defensive System?*

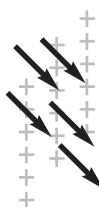
GUIDO CIMADOMO + PILAR MARTÍNEZ PONCE



I.

The Mesopotamian idea of plain Earth surrounded by an ocean which was forbidden to sailing, the punishment being a fall into an unlimited abyss, or the Babylonian cosmogony whose priests described the universe as an oyster in an ocean of water, supported by a sky like a round solid room, are examples of the conception of the Earth by the earliest civilisations.

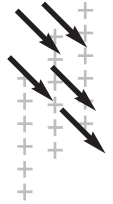
Through the observation of natural phenomena, the Greeks were the first to imagine the earth as a sphere.¹ But till the Middle Ages, the flatness of the earth remained a general belief, with its correlated speculations on concrete limits and definitions. Today we have



more delimited borders, some vanishing while others are built *ex novo*, generating another order of related problems.

Borders exist due to interrelated reasons that are difficult to separate. With some simplifications, we can reduce these to the following flows: economic, migratory, military and touristic.²

The role of globalisation in generating and controlling these flows can hardly be questioned. But what is not so clear is whether globalisation makes the most marginal and poorest countries poorer, or whether these countries are victims of the 'lack of globalisation'³.

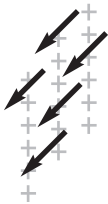


II.

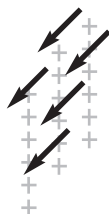
Here we want to focus on the alarming question of the assaults on the fences of Ceuta and Melilla. Spain assumes that illegal border crossings have intensified despite the construction of the fences in the early 1990s; during October 2005, these attempts at crossing occurred with heightened frequency and strength. These attempts could be identified in the bigger movement of people without possibilities who cross the African continent, leaving their homes in the hope of finding a better future in Europe.

If we analyse the paths of immigration followed to enter Europe from the South, we can see evidence of three patterns. First, arrival at the coast of Morocco and Mauritania in the effort to reach Spain (Andalusia and the Canary Islands). Second, arrival through Libya at the coast of Malta and Italy (mostly Lampedusa and other Sicilian islands). Third, arrival at the coast of Greece, a solution that constitutes the longest walk for sub-Saharan people, and mostly used by people following routes from south-east Asia. Maybe airports and land frontiers are the most reliable options for immigrants to reach Europe;⁴ sea-crossing attempts show the highest percentage of people dying in the effort to reach the continent, and provoke questions about all European policies on immigration. These policies are impulsive responses to problems, not consciously planned, long-term strategies.

The implementation of the SIVE control system (a coordinated system of radars and video cameras to control the first 20 kilometres of Mediterranean coastline, connected directly with a coordination centre that directs rescue and immigration forces) along the entire Andalusian coast during the last year has reduced the attempts to cross the Mediterranean Sea. As a consequence, a selection process is initiated when people reach the Moroccan border. Immigrants with money are separated from those without money. The former can attempt to pay for a false passport or for a trip to the opposite coast, while the latter have no possibility other than to settle around the fences of Ceuta and Melilla, and to attempt to cross them.

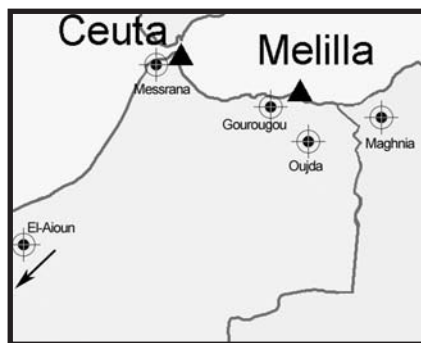


The situation of these European territories on the African continent simplifies the options for attempted entrance. The average waiting period within these settlements is about seven months, and in this time many attempts are made to cross the fences. The Moroccan authorities show no interest in solving the situation, at least up till now, with the Spanish government pressing for more active control on Moroccan side. This situation,



similar to that on the Libyan side, could be interpreted as a way to obtain economic compensations in exchange for more active cooperation in policing their borders.

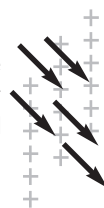
The intention of the EU is to move the pressure from its own limits to those of the nearest countries (Libya and Morocco among others). Last May, the European Border Agency was created to execute EU immigration politics. About €285 million has been allocated for the 2007-2013 period (apart from the fund of €760 million allocated for repatriation of migrants to their countries of origin, and the €2.2 million allocated for strengthening exterior borders). The agency, perhaps created as part of the development of an European Border Police Corps, or a coordinated Coast Guard force, has the assigned task of coordinating between the border forces of member states, preparing risk analyses, and coordinating the repatriation of illegal immigrants. This is a lot of money for the defence of the privileges of what has been called Fortress Europe, with no real attempt to solve the problem at its roots.



III.

The object of these short notes should be read in a double way. For instance, the militarisation of border control, the increasing of the height of the fences from 3 metres to 6 metres where necessary, apart from the building of a third fence proposed for Spain, are just answers to specific problems, as they are always adopted after critical situations. The problem of immigration is not actually of each state independently but rather of the EU in general, as the adoption of the Schengen Agreement in 1985 (with the progressive dissolution of interior borders from 1993) allowed for free movement between its signatory member states; this being applicable, however, only to EU nationals and the transport of EU goods. The solutions that are being proposed show more and more how the interests of the EU lie in strengthening border control, with military force if necessary, and in the politics of the readmission of illegal migrants to their countries of origin.

The assaults put into evidence some legal questions related to the double fence location, that we would like to examine more closely. The fence is defined by two walls that have actually been raised to 6 metres in height from the original height of 3 metres, throughout their length (about 10 kilometres in Melilla and 8 kilometres in Ceuta). Between the fences, a road is used by Spanish forces to control borders (in conjunction with infrared cameras and more advanced tools, that contrast with the rudimentary tools used for the assaults: ladders, gloves and clothes for protection). The way institutions (Spanish or Moroccan, equally), act through these assaults shows the degree of this unresolved problem. The Spanish expelled immigrants (in the process of trespassing or already in



Spanish territory)⁵, without questioning the legality of the act of expulsion. According to Spanish migration law, the expulsion of migrants found on national territory has to be registered by the police before the action is done. These principles are not followed in practice, with the law disregarding the rights of migrants and asylum seekers. Morocco, which usually looks upon migrants as clandestines, started deporting them beyond the southern national border, into the desert, without shelter or humanitarian aid. The legal advisory is reduced, nationalities are not acknowledged, refugees are not recognised; the only official aim is to expel all undesired visitors from the more privileged/desired country.

IV.

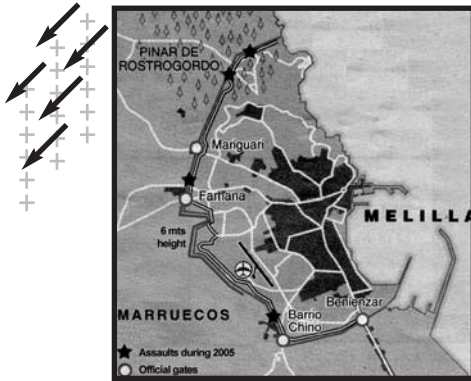
Another aspect we want to question is the interaction of these migratory flows with the fences. The long path to Europe has many stops, dangers to be avoided and ways to be walked, but it is the arrival at the EU frontier that we want to focus on. The fence is a permeable membrane according to the genre of flows it has to filter, but in the case of migratory ones it becomes a dense wall. We could say it generates an opposite vector force against the natural flow of migrants, whose only chance is to settle nearby while attempting to cross. We can consider as another vector the (often violent) pressure of Moroccan forces, due to which attempts to cross the border have grown in number and intensity. The consequence of this is the creation of unconventional settlements: at this time we can count five (Oujda and Maghnia on the Algerian border; Gourougou in Melilla; Belyounech on the border of Ceuta; Messrana in Tangier; and El Aioun and Dejla in Sahara, the nearest to the Canary Islands).⁶



including cooking, collecting water, constructing ladders for the purpose of scaling the fences, and creating means of protection such as gloves for the hands during crossing attempts, is a group effort. The celebration of religious ceremonies to sustain a vivid hope for a better future, together with the self-regulation and self-organisation of these settlements, is further evidence of the ordinary, peaceful aspirations of this 'community'.

V.

At the risk of necessary simplifications, we can say that the situation is mostly due to



political forces at the highest levels. The repetition of international meetings and congresses, full of well-intentioned declarations but void of real solutions for the problems already identified, show how difficult it is to take action. Actual immigration policies tend, through *ad hoc* legalisation processes, to accept only the number of immigrants needed to implement the national work force; while economic policies tend to see the issue as a means of obtaining more privileges and opportunities for national companies. The difference between richer and poorer countries is growing, in part due to the opportunities that these companies find in the poorer countries. In

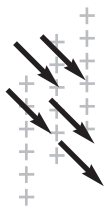
any case, whatever the policies, money flows move from the South to the richest countries.

In situations related with border limits these actions directly affect space and territory, hence the quality of life. The Berlin Wall, and Israel's fences raised with the excuse that they are a necessary defence against Palestinian attacks, are the most famous examples that we can cite in our reflection on how political separation barriers influence life in their neighbourhoods. For this very relevant reason, spatial practitioners should have an important role in proposing solutions for these conflicted spaces. Architects should be accorded a role in creating solutions that permit inclusion, interaction between communities, and development on both sides of the border, areas treated as marginal and whose full potential is still not considered.

Of course, the solution to such a big problem is not only in the hands of urbanists and architects. Their voices must also be attended by those of politicians, together with those of many other professionals, reflecting on how to resolve or palliate what is, in the end, an unequal distribution of opportunities.

*Ceuta is a Spanish enclave in North Africa, located on a northern tip of the Maghreb, on the Mediterranean coast near the Strait of Gibraltar. Its area is approximately 28 square kilometres. It has a rank between a standard Spanish city and an autonomous community. It forms part of the territory of the European Union. Melilla is a Spanish enclave in North Africa, located in the northernmost tip of the Maghreb, on the Mediterranean coast. Its area is approximately 20 square kilometres. Its population consists of Christians, Muslims, Jews and a small minority of Hindus. For over three decades, Morocco has claimed Ceuta, Melilla, the Canary Islands and various small islands off the coast of Africa, drawing comparison with Spain's territorial claim to Gibraltar.

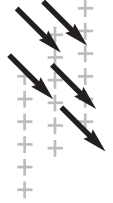
The Ceuta border fence is a separation barrier between Morocco and Ceuta. Constructed by Spain, its stated purpose is to stop illegal immigration and smuggling. The €30 million razor wire barrier was financed by the European Union. It consists of 8 kilometres of 3-metre fences topped with barbed



wire, with regular watchtowers and a road running between them, to accommodate police patrols. Underground cables connect spotlights, noise, movement and infrared sensors and video cameras to a central control booth. The Melilla border fence is a separation barrier between Morocco and the city of Melilla, considered by all countries except Morocco to be an integral part of Spain. The construction of the razor wire fence cost Spain €33 million. This barrier consists of 10 kilometres of parallel 3-metre fences, closely resembling the Ceuta fence. The height of both the Ceuta and Melilla fences is currently being raised to 6 metres.

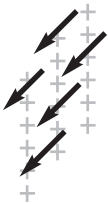
Morocco has objected to the construction of both fences as it considers Ceuta and Melilla to be occupied Moroccan land, and since 1975 has sought full handing over of both territories.

In October 2005, over 700 sub-Saharan immigrants tried to enter Spanish territory from the Moroccan border. Many of them were shot in the back, allegedly by the Moroccan *gendarmérie* as well as the Spanish police. Amnesty International and Médécins Sans Frontières have accused the Moroccan government of dumping over 500 refugees in the Sahara desert, without food and water.



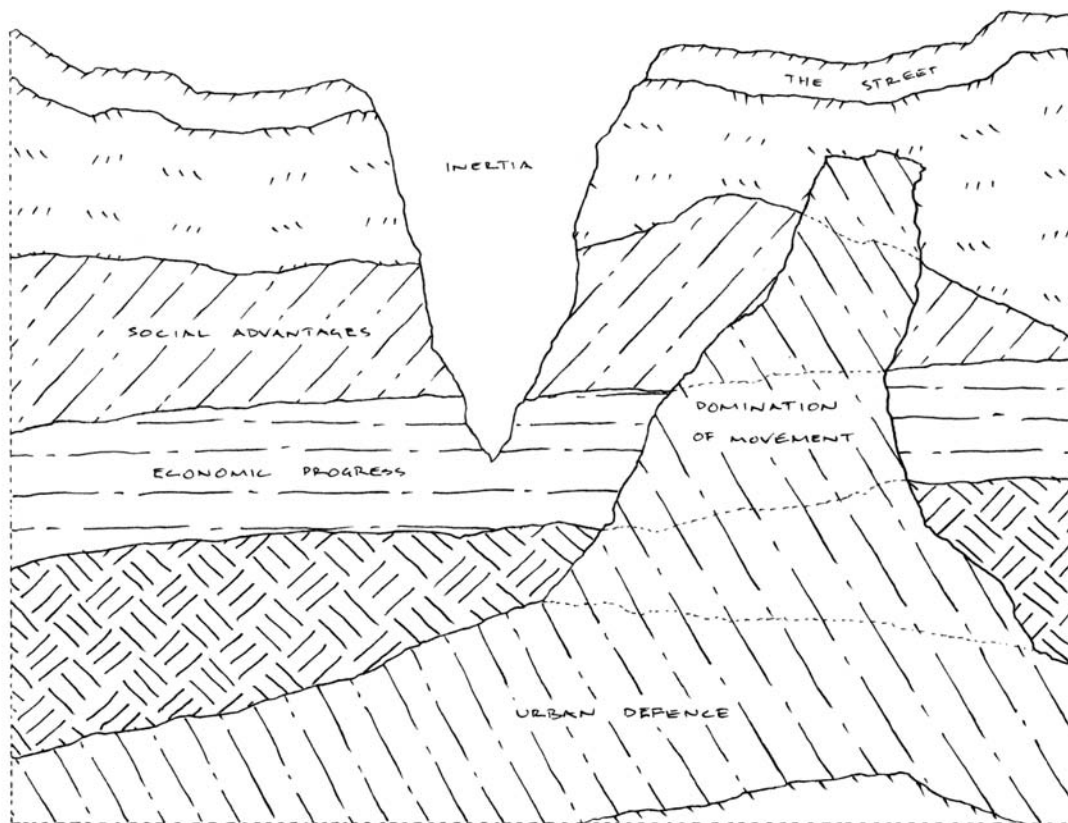
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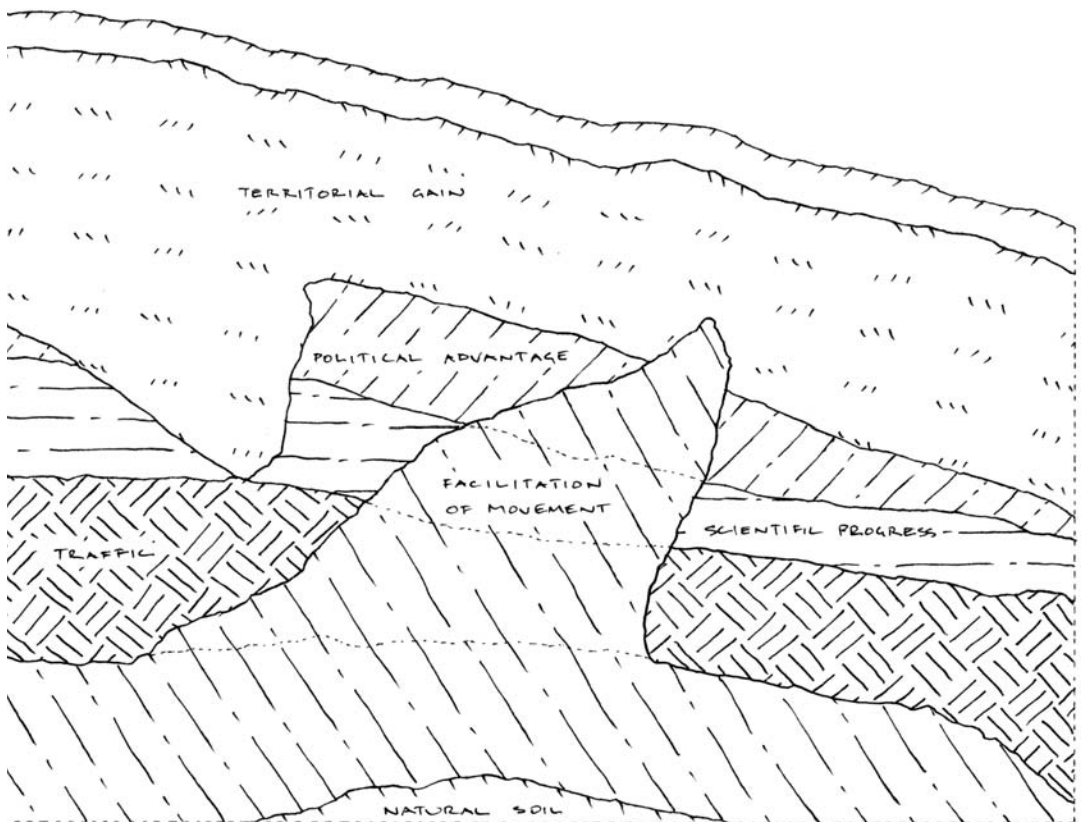
1. Aristotle developed the first astronomic observations that questioned the notion of the flatness of the earth. In *On The Heavens*, Bk. II (350 BC), Aristotle summarised the reasons for the Greek belief in the curvature of the earth. (1) Certain stars disappeared beyond the southern hemisphere as one travelled north, and beyond the northern hemisphere as one travelled south. (2) The earth's shadow on the moon during a lunar eclipse was always the arc of a circle. (3) On earth itself, ships disappear beyond the horizon hull-first in whatever direction they are travelling. These facts could not be explained if the earth's surface were flat, but could be explained by assuming the earth to be a sphere. Aristotle's observations are based on the phenomenon of parallax, the angular shift or change in the apparent position of an object due the change in the position of the observer.
2. From Latin *fluxus*, the act and effect of flowing. *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. Edición Electrónica, Versión 21.1.0. Real Academia Española, 1992.
3. Guillermo de la Dehesa. "La Economía Tecnológica". In *El País*, 2 January 2005, Sec. Negocios 1000, p. 9.
4. Tomás Bárbulo. "El Verdadero Agujero Negro de Schengen Está en los Aeropuertos". In *El País*, 25 December 2005, Sec. España, p. 19.
5. Surveillance forces seem to forget the fact that the Melilla fence is all within Spanish territory; those who manage to climb the first of the two existent parts of the fence are therefore already within Europe.
6. Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía. "Informe sobre la Inmigración Clandestina durante el Año 2004". 10 January 2005.
<http://www.apdha.org/areas/documentos/inmigra2004.pdf>.
7. Juan Jesús Aznárez. "Tijuana, Frontera del Arte". In *El País*, 5 February 2005, Sec. Babelia, p. 2.

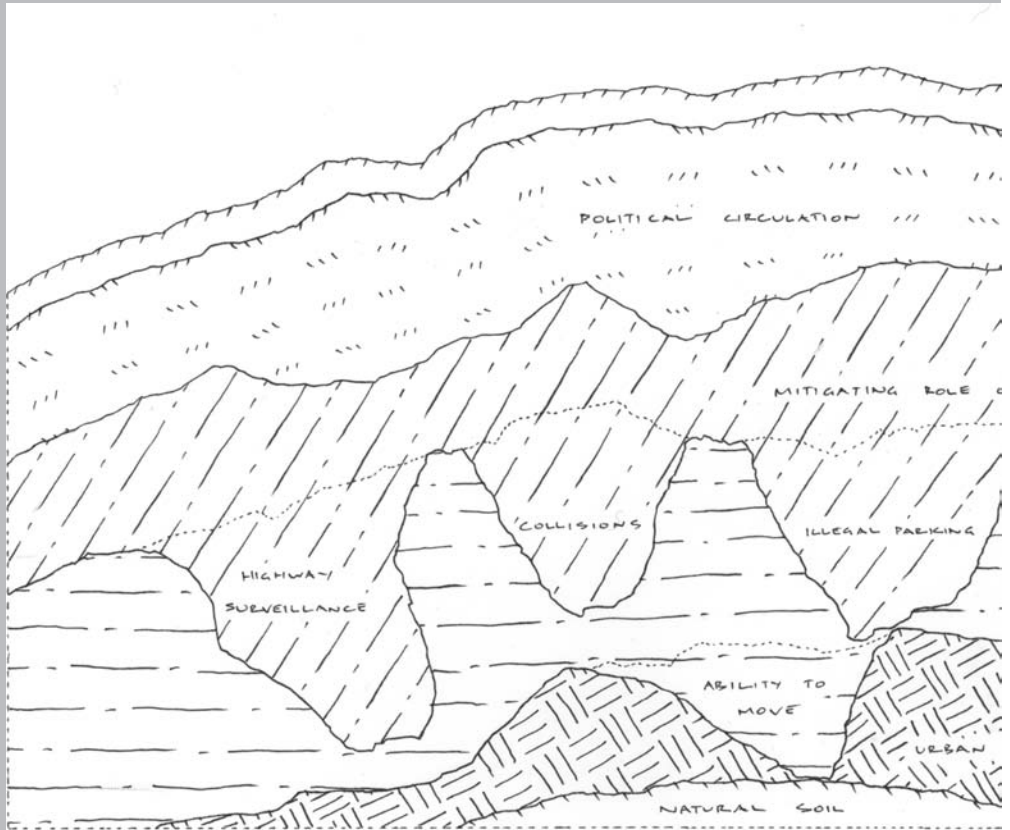


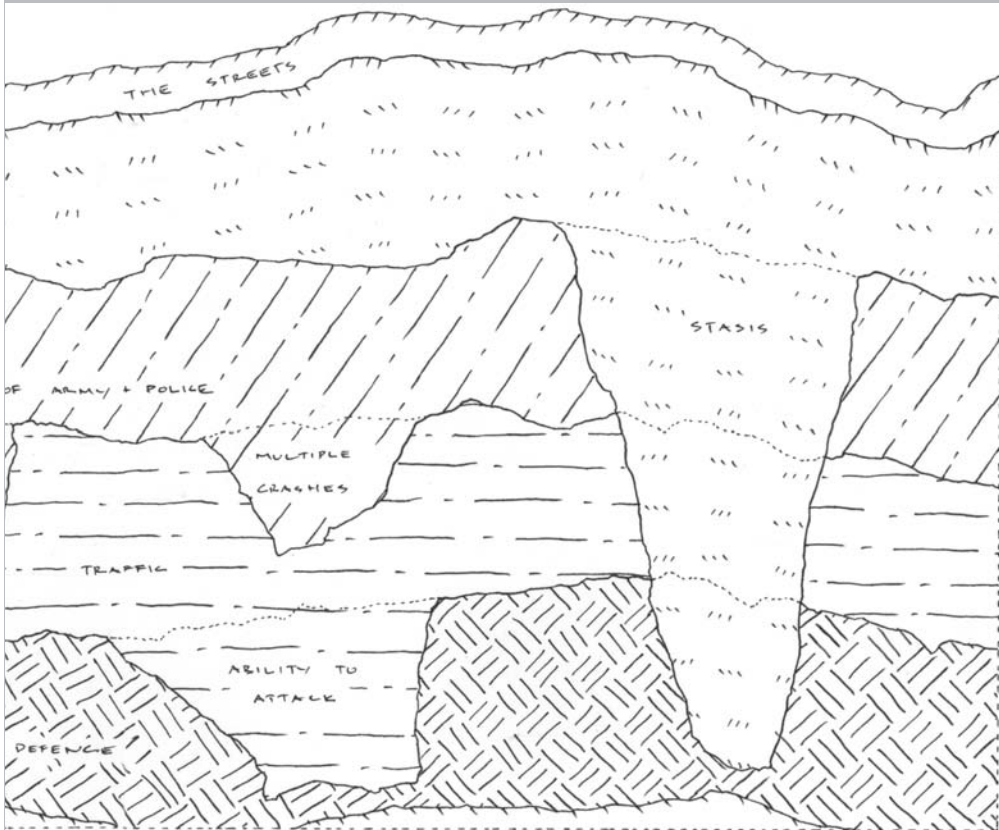
Shifting Sediments

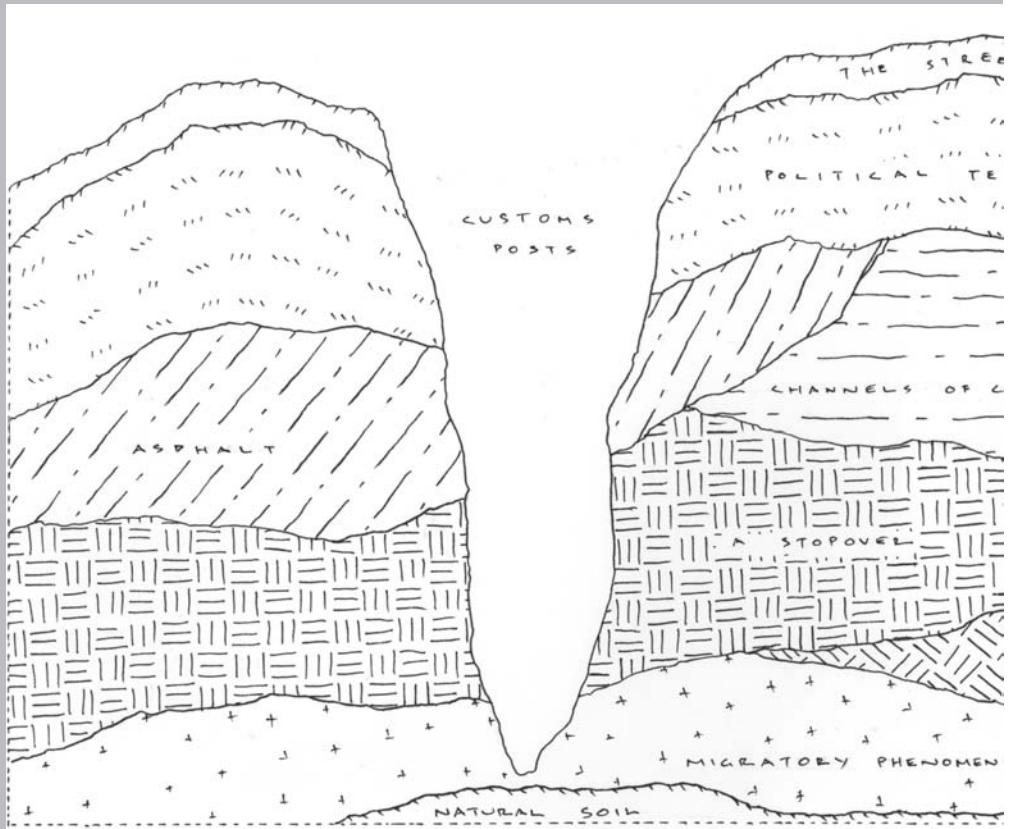
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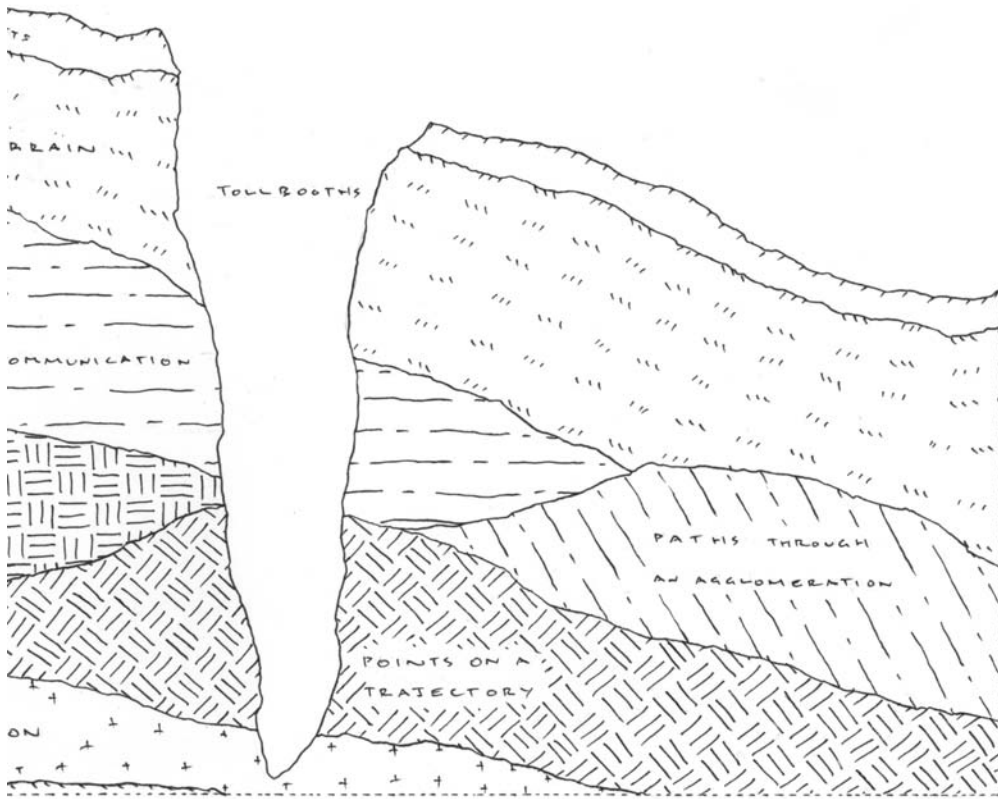


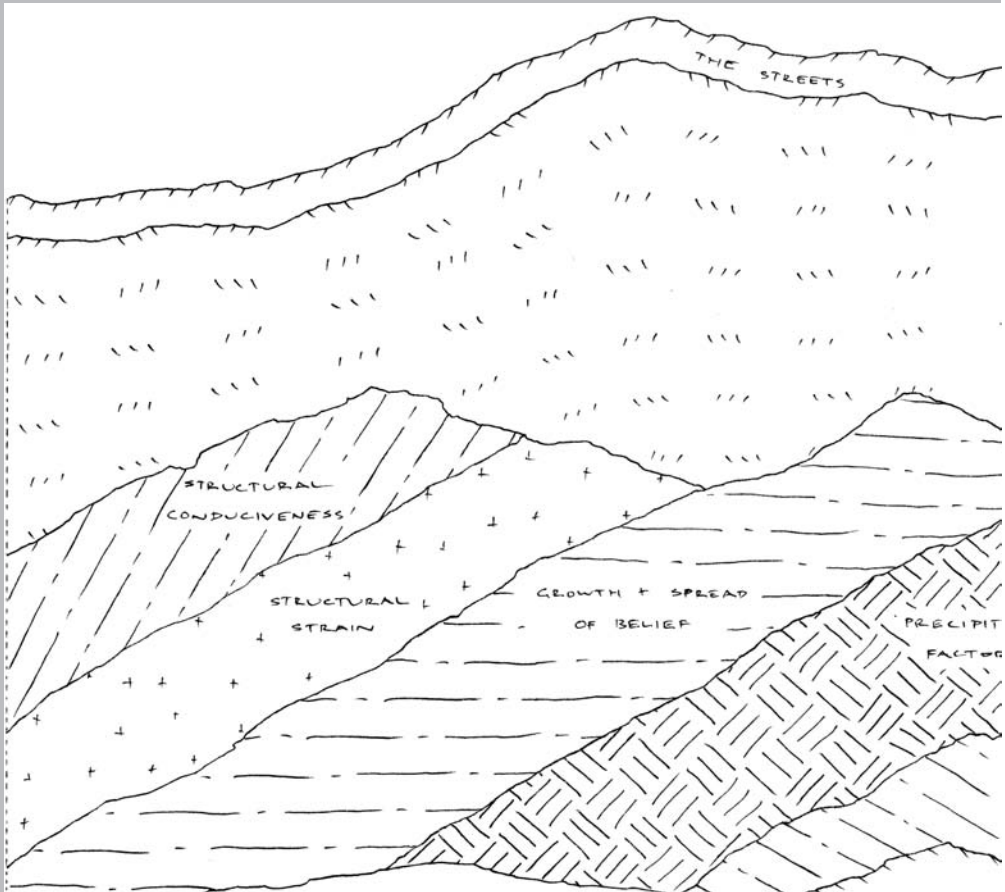


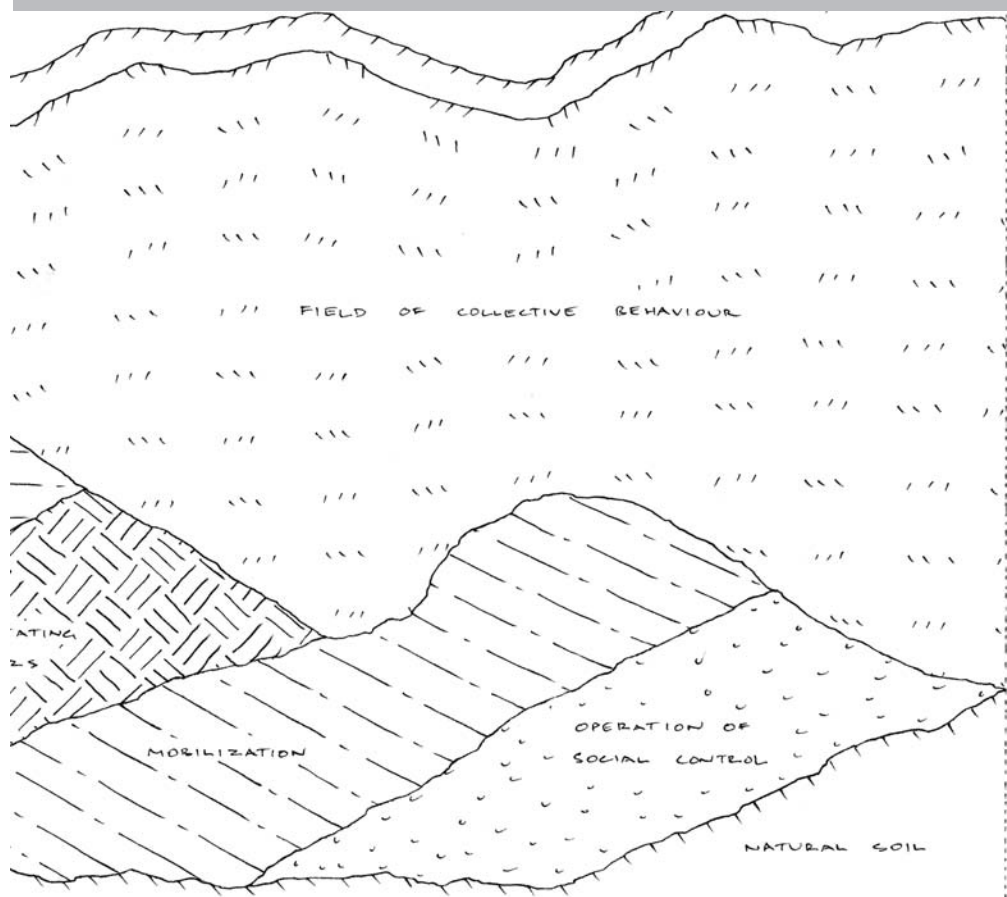


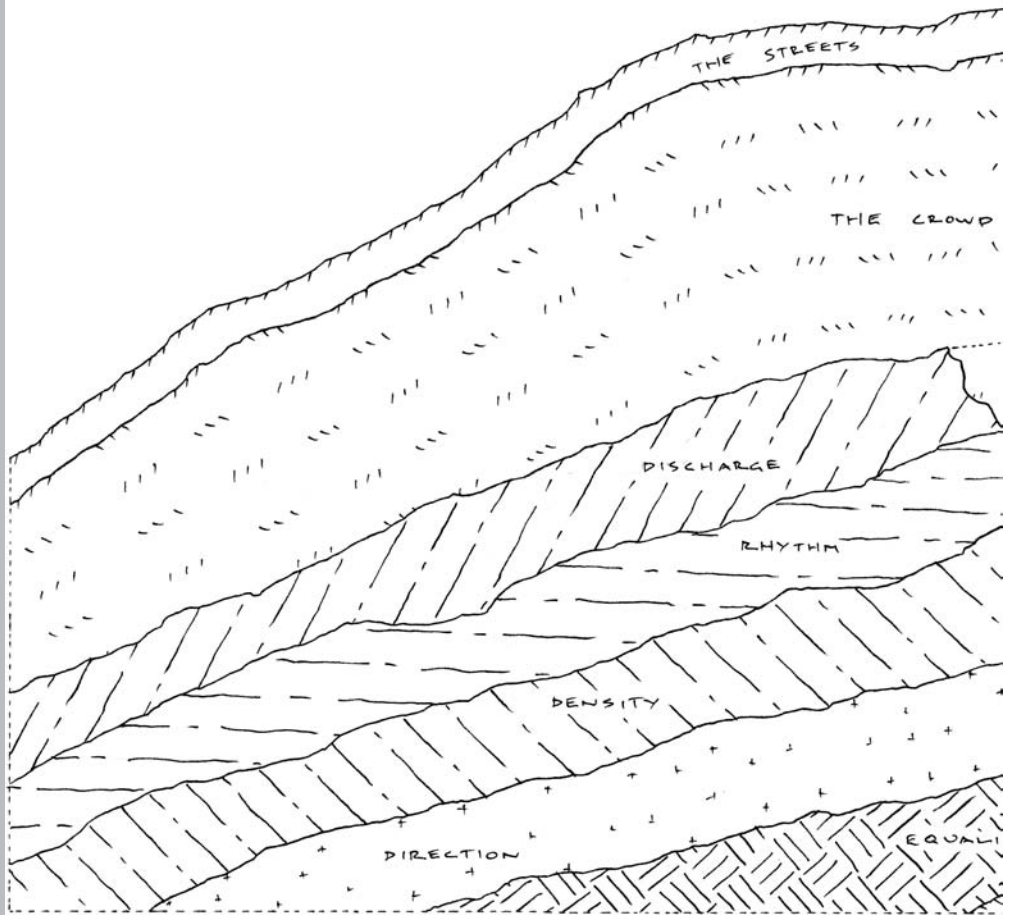


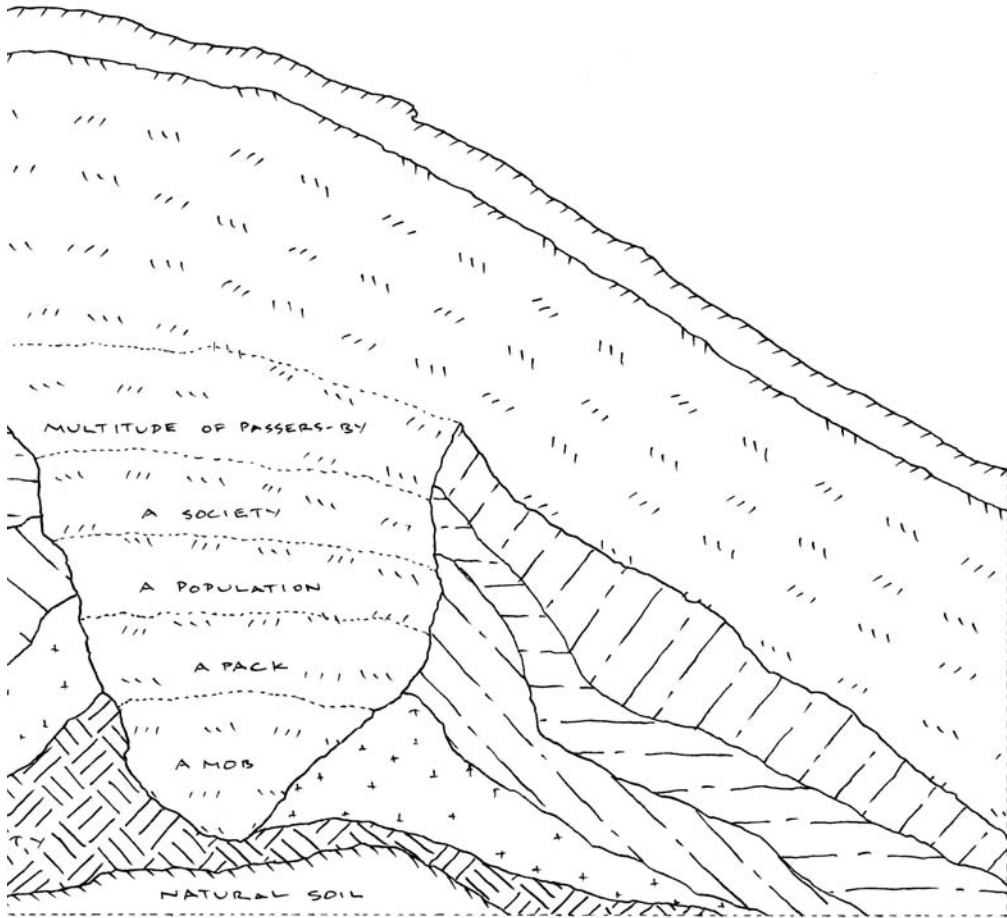


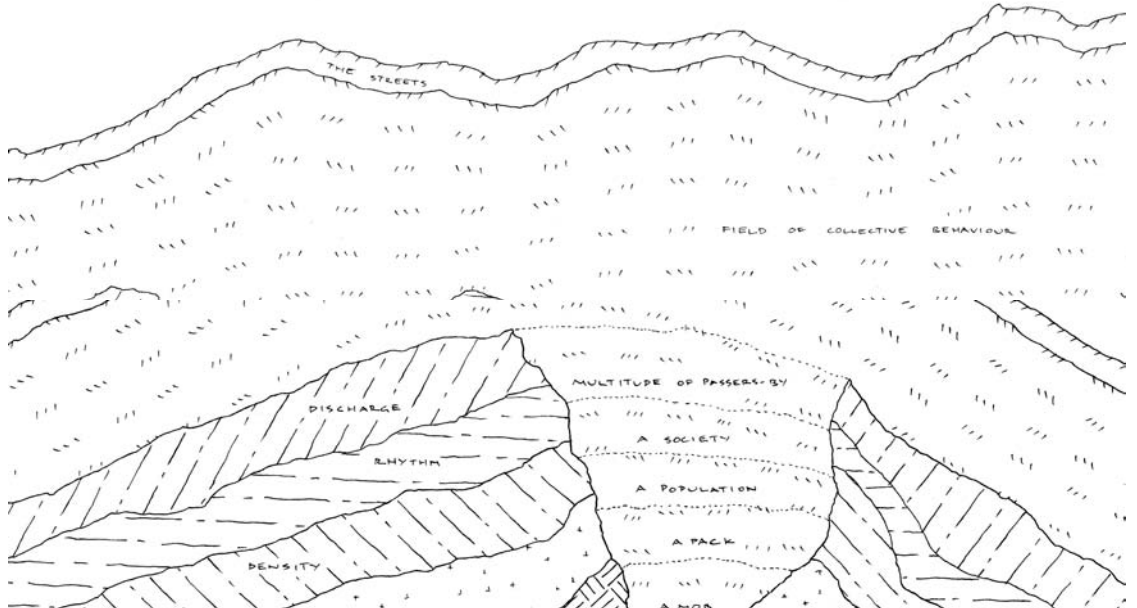
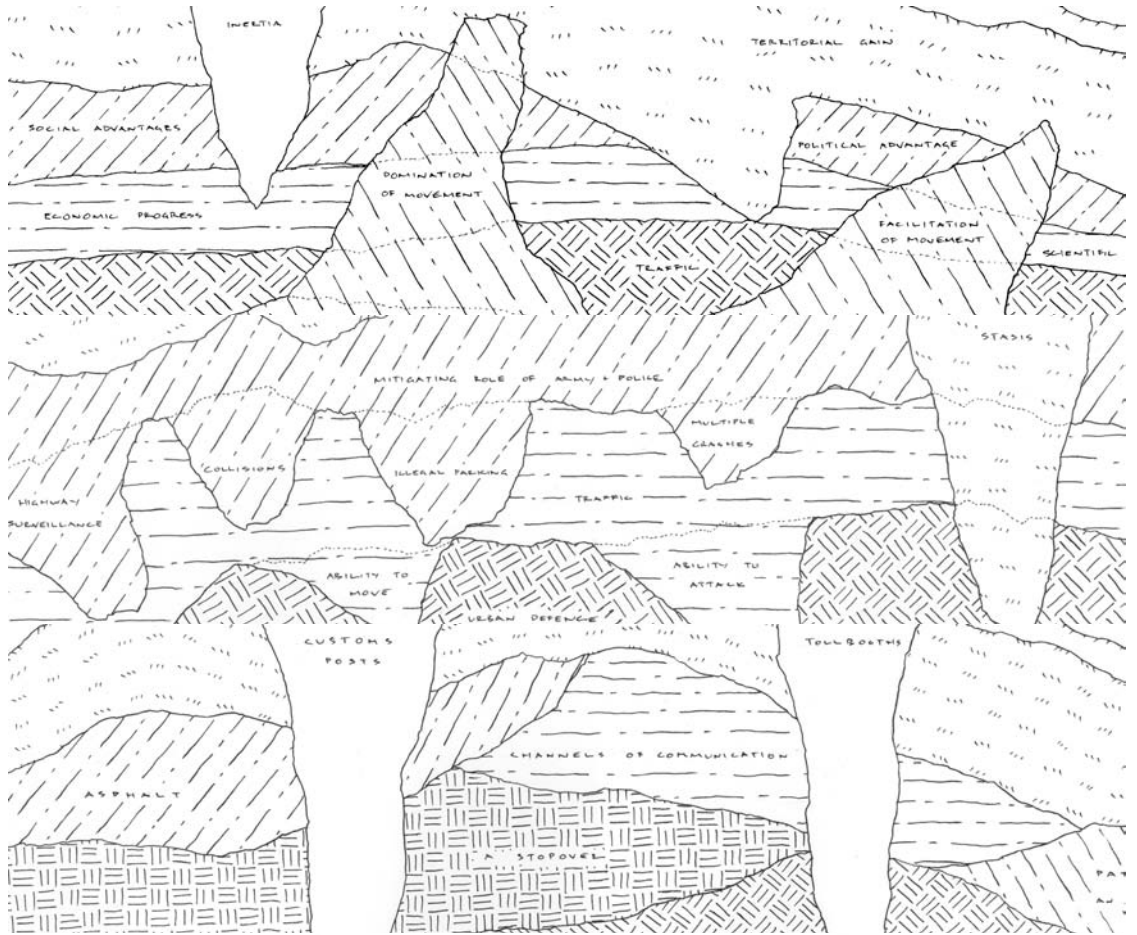












Signal Disturbance

Questions - Media / Art / Identity

A word cloud visualization of the word "turbulence". The word is repeated numerous times in various sizes, orientations, and colors (including shades of blue, green, and yellow). The words are arranged in a dense, swirling pattern, creating a sense of movement and chaos, which visually represents the concept of turbulence. The background is a solid light blue.

What Hit the News-Stand?!

Introduction to a Dialogue

NASRIN TABATABAI, BABAK AFRASSIABI + KIANOOSH VAHABI



We may start by asking this: how does the unpredictability and inconsistency of the condition of the press in Iran hit the newspaper kiosk?

Or in other words, how do kiosk owners cope with this inconsistency and unpredictability?

As a display window from where news is distributed, the newspaper kiosk mirrors the disoriented, kaleidoscopic condition of the press (and of daily life, for that matter): affected by bans and releases, censorship and qualifications, rest and unrest, political division and hysteria. Often, the squeezed, claustrophobic space of the news-stand is not enough for the large number of publications. The displays frequently spill onto the sidewalks, making it hard for pedestrians to simply pass by. It is apparent that the spatial management of the kiosk is pursued through a continuous arrangement and rearrangement of its goods by the owners; what was displayed yesterday may have to be left out tomorrow^a

The lack of a consistent discourse (social or political) is compensated for by a continual recombination of shattered bits and pieces of signifying fragments: a kaleidoscopic attempt in continuously reconnecting the remaining pieces of coloured glass to shift in varieties of social and political configurations. These substitutive configurations, delusional as they may sometimes be, offer limitless ways of articulation, or in the case of the kiosk, of infinite spatial arrangements.

What are the parameters that define the structure of these configurations? Can these configurations help us in designing a kiosk, one that would reflect the condition of the press and at the same time offer a flexible space for infinite reconfigurations of the kiosk?

A gradually and continually altering architectural space, with elements that define different proportions of openness/enclosure, opacity/transparency, brightness/darkness, could be thought of in relation to the shifting patterns in the media. This can include the kiosks, over the years. The changing pattern of this space might be derived from a statistical diagram, which includes parameters associated with fluctuations in the number of publications, or other aspects in relation to time, which could then be interpreted in terms of architectural space and form.

Can formal oppositions such as openness/enclosure, opacity/transparency and brightness/darkness define the content of the model? These parameters are important as far as their factual nature can add relevancy and authenticity to the design. We need to maintain the idea of the kiosk as a location where actions take place.

The idea of proposing a new design for a news-stand in Tehran is a pretext for addressing the complex and layered socio-political and architectural condition surrounding the newsstands. However, we need not arrive at an actually functioning design. The aim is to design an 'object' that somehow suggests a news stand, a metonymic approach to the current condition.

Rather than coping with the problem of a changing configuration of materials, the newsstand owners have been trying to deal with more practical problems. The kiosks are too small to accommodate all the materials, and the owners are forced to lay their goods on the pavement around their stands. They usually lose a lot of their materials when it rains, and sometimes the papers are blown away by the wind.



Socio-economically, the kiosk owners are either poor, or come from the class with an average income. They have always been trying to increase their income by selling additional materials and goods such as cigarettes, candies, pills, and most recently, dial-up Internet subscription cards. They have now been banned from selling cigarettes, and this will cause their economic status to deteriorate considerably. Considering the fact that less than 20% of the news-stand's total income derives from newspapers and magazines, it is not clear how it would be possible for the owners to survive if they are not allowed to sell other goods too.

The public, kiosk owners, publishers, municipalities, designers and kiosk manufacturers all have their own viewpoints about this issue, but they do not exchange ideas with each other in order to reach an appropriate decision that can be applied to the design, manufacturing, location and function of news-stands. It is ironic that the news-stand, as one of the main portals of information and media in any society, should suffer due to this particular lack of communication.

From a wider perspective, the failure to establish comprehensive communication creates a political and social environment in which there is little tolerance for different or opposing ideas. Here lies one of the main roots of prejudice, which believes in a unilateral mode of cultural and political expression. The result: a closing of all alternative media and media forms to guarantee a homogeneous cultural environment.

Dialogue and communication are an integral part of any design process, especially in public spaces. The ideal architectonic structure for an individual is always an unbalanced and exaggerated one, which highlights and deals with a few characteristics or functions that look most important to a single party involved in the process of decision making about architecture. It is always essential to include different viewpoints about any architectural or urban project through comprehensive dialogues between different parties, so as to reach a balanced condition in the end. Communication and exchange of ideas are definitely a major part of an architectural design process that is supposed to respond to the requirements of the majority of people. This is also something that should be logically considered in the case of news-stands, in an urban context.

Most kiosk owners do not really care about the papers they sell, since the sale constitutes only a small fraction of their income. They do not have the real drive to think about possible solutions to present the maximum number of papers, and therefore many of them are never put on display. Apparently they are mostly concerned about the other goods they sell. In economic terms, their ideal kiosk in fact has little to do with the primary function that has been 'imposed' on it.

Actually, the ideal design is in some cases relevant to the illegitimacy or illegality of desired features. Some of these illegal acts or features in design are associated with real urban constraints that are devised to ensure social order or convenience. They are set as standards or regulations that are more or less similar in all urban

contexts throughout the world (urban traffic, compatibility of design with other urban amenities, safety, security, and so on). The features that characterise our approach in Kiosk # 947, as a project that is associated with Tehran, are the specific definitions of illegal acts that are somehow spectacular and unique in this particular context, as social tolerance and regulations or laws in Tehran differ from those in other contexts. Spatial boundaries for Tehran news-stands, irrationally fixed by the municipality and unable to adapt to the multiple functions of these spaces, are among these specific legal limitations.

There are some design features that are ideal for different parties and are not always legitimate or legal. For instance, considering the question of size and location of news-stands: the shopkeepers in the proximity of nearly all kiosks prefer the kiosks to be eliminated because of the damage the structures do to shops in terms of visual blockage or competition.

The kiosk owners themselves want to have the maximum possible space to accommodate all the different goods they sell. They would perhaps visualise the form of a big shop that allows them to benefit from the privileged location of a space accessible from four sides. They would also like this space to function as a residence or accommodation as well as a business. They would naturally dislike another similar kiosk in the vicinity of their own space within an effective range. On the other hand, pedestrians prefer to have kiosks in easily accessible locations, with ample space provided in which to search for their desired papers or other goods sold in a kiosk. They naturally may not care about or support the kiosks being located in areas allocated to vehicles. People in cars prefer the kiosks to be in an easily accessible location, where they can buy goods without getting out of their vehicles. Naturally, each driver would prefer this portal to be vertically positioned according to the height of his own seat in the vehicle. The drivers would not care to have the kiosk located on the sidewalk or in the middle of the street.

Certain spatial criteria can be recognised as favourable or undesirable according to the interests of different groups, while the government, which is supposed to consider the benefits and interests of the majority in a democratic order, determines the legitimacy of that feature.

An identical methodology is involved in the limits that are set for the media, including

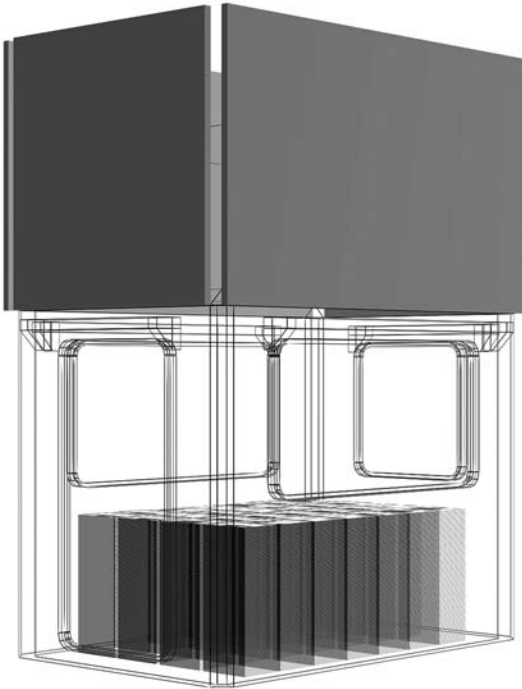


publications, in all countries. The defining factor in this regard is the power and force that each side can apply, through jurisdiction, civil procedures or other means. Subsequently, boundaries that are set for freedom of speech are neither absolute nor permanent in any case, and at any given time can only reflect a temporary balance of social forces and powers.

Dealing with the content and the limits of legality or legitimacy in the media, necessarily leads to the question of political power. The process that determines the balanced condition between the interests of different parties, keeping the benefit of the majority in mind, is essentially a democratic one. But this is not the case in many countries, including Iran.

In relation to media content, there are some areas where the preferences of the ruled majority and the ruling minority overlap to some extent. For instance, the majority of Iranians do not like any magazine or newspaper displayed in newsstands to contain pornography, and if such a publication is displayed, the people themselves will act harshly against that. But many restrictions (either openly declared, or unspoken but applied) that are set for the media are virtually of little or no importance to the majority, as long as people have no civil means to express

their exact opinions, or prefer not to participate in any public dialogue that may challenge their stand in terms of religious or political beliefs.



The illegitimacy of outspoken desires becomes interesting in relation to the lack of communication; or the symptom of incomprehensive communication that the kiosk, as one of the main portals of information and media, suffers from. Manifestations of desire are always beyond language, and beyond any social order for that matter, and communication is definitely the last thing that these manifestations are about. If in a place like Iran there is little tolerance for difference or opposing ideas, and if everyone is pursuing his/her own interests, it is because the desires of the majority have undergone a long-term

suppression under a power that longs for a homogeneous cultural and political environment. Each small gap in the system is seen by people as an opportunity to express their individual presence, or as a mechanism to be utilised for individual advantage. Sometimes these efforts may be petty struggles, desperate strategies with little significance, merely giving the illusion of some kind of independence.

The illegitimacy of these strategies is interesting only as far as they offer new possibilities. What may help to develop this new design is to understand the way in which these 'gaps' are deployed in different ways. The temporary reinterpretation of these gaps into functional spaces may not result in long-lasting spatial infrastructures, but they are nevertheless some kind of concrete manifestation of desire. In the case of the kiosks in Tehran, these reinterpretations go only as far as a perennial rearrangement of disjointed spaces: a little more than one square metre on the sidewalk, sometimes a few metres away from the kiosk itself, for displaying additional newspapers; plastic sheets to function as some kind of shelter next to the kiosk on rainy days; a string of coloured light bulbs hanging outside to indicate a claim to expanded territory ^a

Identical strategies are used by the media, in particular by some newspapers, in reinterpreting the gaps or temporary openings in the system to reposition themselves. They are similarly often seen to be reconfiguring their position over and over, sometimes by reappearing under different names after being banned by the state. However, it is less interesting to focus on the ways that spatial boundaries and restrictions are set for both the kiosk and the media; a far more interesting approach, and one that can help to develop a design proposal, is to work out an understanding of the ways in which both entities redefine and expand their boundaries, or in some cases even reduce them.

In this respect the design proposal itself becomes political, taking the act of repositioning as a methodology for design, where design becomes the continuation of the political event, and is the evidence of a political disposition rather than the end of the event.

In other words, the project may start from a particular production of local discourse, but should evolve into a universal one: that of tackling issues concerning the condition of the press, news production, distribution and circulation, news ban and release, through addressing the architectonics of the news-stand. And this in turn proceeds through a design proposal for a new kiosk in Tehran.

This proposal carries with itself all the symptomatic significances and attributes of the news-stands in Tehran. In fact, the design proposal is a pretext to addressing these symptoms by way of excessively internalising them into the designing process. The act of designing is a mimesis of an actual design process, one of re-adopting the existing lacks in the condition of the kiosk, and the press, for that matter.

But at the same time, since it presents a symptomatic design for the kiosk (a proposal that may be unrealisable), it automatically becomes decentralised, referring beyond itself, to the actual problems of the kiosk/the press.

Translated into architectural form, the main response to all the problems caused by the banning and restricted release of newspapers would be 'flexibility', which can be seen in the

design of displays and stacking spaces. Needless to say, there are many other forces, requirements, functions and regulations involved in forming an actual or potential design for a kiosk, many of which are more related to economy and urban issues. For instance, the fact that many kiosk workers sleep in their kiosk and use it as an accommodation or residence is architecturally a significant issue. Another important point is the prevailing illegitimate use of kiosks to sell other goods, which is rooted in an economic condition.

The main concept in the new design is to propose a longitudinally expandable and latitudinally scalable structure, which shows some sort of intermediary condition that is formed as the result of a continual challenge, and can still be reconfigured according to upcoming changes.

As the unsettled condition of the printed media continues to fluctuate, with the number of newspapers and magazines frequently changing, the kiosk can be altered to adapt to the current condition. It can be expanded to have more displays for newspapers in provided stands and spaces, or to retract these and transform into a snack bar, or even a temporary residence in extreme conditions.

It also has to accommodate the permanent challenge between kiosk owners who usually try to expand their territory, and municipality operatives who try to control this desire for territorial expansion.

The condition of kiosks has some interesting analogies with the nomadic lifestyle followed by many Iranians throughout their history. This lifestyle was intrinsically flexible, habituated to continual shifts and changes in the surrounding environment; it responded to these changes with lightweight or ephemeral methods. Nomads lived in temporary structures such as tents, and carried minimal personal goods. Similarly, kiosk owners adapt to the daily pressures faced by their business, such as rain and wind, lack of display space, or the need to convert the kiosk into a residence at night. Kiosks can also be thought of as portable structures that are amenable to relocation, according to the preferences of kiosk owners and a minimal set of rules set by the government to regulate and manage this relocation, taking into account urban conditions and limitations.

Maybe we have to address each architectural element of the kiosk (interior, windows, display shelves, sidewalk displays, roof, air conditioning; and the kiosks' spatial expansions, lack of formal consistency, capacity to block off traffic, etc.) separately and individually, outside any urban location. This would automatically prevent the design from becoming an object suggesting a kind of wholeness integrated into a specific site.

To develop a reflective model (design proposal) for each of the elements without considering or placing them within the totality of the kiosk would help us to address the various attributions (architectural, social and political) that they each have; attributions that also in reality may not be compatible to one another.

In reflecting on each detail, it is important to consider its relation to the condition of the press, and try to re-attribute these details from an extremity that is both affects and is affected by these conditions. An example would be the re-attribution ; designing ; of the space of the sidewalks used for displaying the variety of publications for sale: internalising in the design the problems around distribution and the banning and release of papers by considering different spatial levels of display, adjustable to the changing political and economic climates.

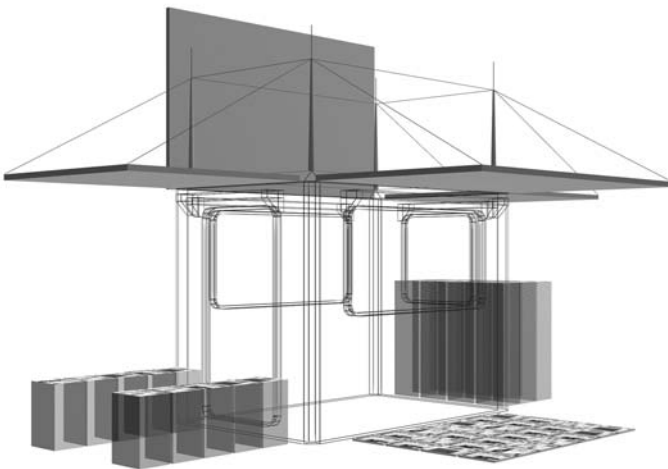
One proposal was to analyse the ideal or desired features (either legitimate or illegitimate) visualised by different people associated with the news-stands, and reproduce these features as an architectural and social phenomenon. This strategy would help to present multifaceted images of different issues related to kiosks. Methods of presentation (the ways in which newspapers and magazines are put on display), and the news-stand design might be completely different when they are created according to the viewpoints of publishers and kiosk owners. The expectations, as well as the functional and formal requirements, of the design object are formed by different cultural and socio-economic attitudes.

For instance, it is an established fact that Iran has been dominated by verbal culture for centuries. In general, many cultural productions have never been documented or saved. In addition, many written materials have been processed back and mass-produced in verbal form.

Ferdowsi's Shah-Nameh, one of the most important works of Persian literature, has been recited (with many compromises in accuracy) in public spaces such as teahouses, perhaps for centuries. Many people used to know the Shah-Nameh through these recitals alone, without ever reading the book itself.

Nowadays the news is also commonly received through the act of listening to different people who quote it from different unidentified sources.

This dominance of verbal culture is characterised by inaccuracy, inconsistency and unreliability in many aspects of life. This can also be traced in cultural productions, including the media in general and specifically the



printed news. However, with the growing number of educated people and the changing patterns of social life, this condition seems to be now shifting. The demand for publications, and specifically for newspapers and magazines, is expanding, but the 'verbal culture symptom' is still strongly present both in the printed materials and in the way they are read and analysed.

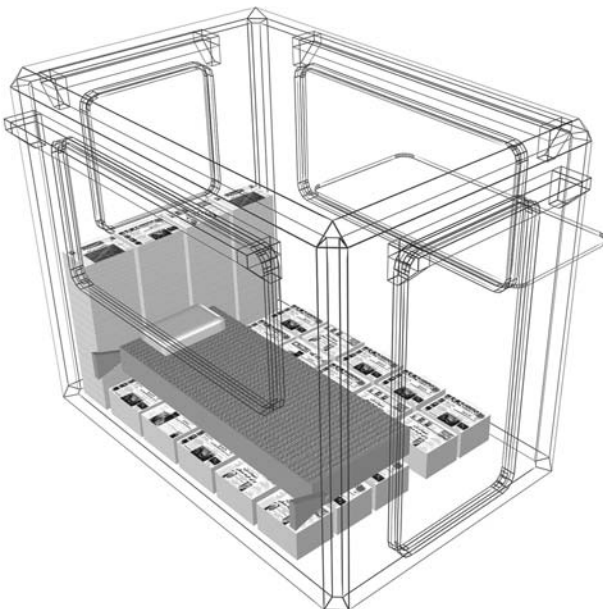
On the other hand, due to vigorous controls and restrictions that have been imposed on the media, people tend to consider the news as unreliable and fake in many cases. People's attitude towards the media, newspapers, and consequently to the news-stands could possibly be analysed from this perspective. As there are 'red lines' that vaguely define the limits within which the media are supposed to convey information, there are also specific boundaries that define the whole content of the media.

These boundaries are set by both the Iranian political system and Iranian cultural sensitivities. It becomes unlawful to write about certain issues, sometimes: for instance, in recent years discussions about potential diplomatic relations with the US have been officially banned in the media, through a direct order by the country's leadership.

To search for the cause of this symptom of distrustfulness is less interesting than the ways and forms in which this symptom manifests itself. For instance, it is interesting that instead of a single truth about an event, there are a variety of contradictory stories and narratives about that event. Different newspapers and magazines each fabricate their own report; books are written about the event, and finally, truth is displaced by the overwhelming amount of information.

This urge to fabricate stories is perhaps related to the cultural practice of/reliance on verbal culture. We could say the news-stand is a place from where stories and narratives are distributed and stimulated.

Is it then culturally significant that these stories of 'truth' are inaccurate, inconsistent and unreliable? They are reliable as far as they tell a story, which for its part stimulates another story, which stimulates another, and so on. This motor is kept running by the unreliability and the inconsistencies of the versions. Everyone wants to participate in completing the puzzle to arrive at



a unified picture, but the more pieces are added, the more gaps are introduced that need to be filled with new stories.

This dialogue was excerpted from extensive e-mail correspondence between the authors. A version of the text has appeared in a supplementary publication in relation to *Kiosk #947*, a project initiated by Pages (Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi) and developed in collaboration with Kianoosh Vahabi. The work was exhibited at the Collective Creativity Exhibition, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany, May 1 - July 17, 2006. www.pagesmagazine.net (Farsi/English).



The Sand of the Coliseum, the Glare of Television, and the Hope of Emancipation

NANCY ADAJANIA

I.

Milan Kundera once observed that every Utopia secures the purity of its goals by consigning its undesirables to a septic tank. And so, in tyrannies that are able to enforce Utopia, we have the concentration camp, the death camp, the gulag and the holding area. But what of some of the republics we know: those more humane drafts towards Utopia that have come dangerously close to failure, and whose septic tanks are not occasional aberrations, but everyday horror zones to which the marginal are consigned?

In this essay I will reflect on the Indian republic, which was established in 1950 as the outcome of an epic anti-colonial struggle for liberation; and which committed itself to serving the welfare of the greatest number, to securing the good of the oppressed and the dispossessed, the starving and the marginal. In actuality, through the six decades of its existence, it has increasingly become characterised by swollen margins ; it leaves its subjects naked, exposed, leading a *vita nuda*, a bare life , protected neither by divine sanction nor by the rule of law, easy game for any predator.

The philosopher Giorgio Agamben has examined the condition of bare life and its embodiment, the *homo sacer*, or sacred man : a paradoxically-named figure in Roman law, who is excluded from all civil rights and may be killed with impunity by anybody.¹ Agamben cites the examples of the Nazi camps and Guantanamo Bay as sites where the *homo sacer* has been incarcerated, suffering torture, grotesque violations of body and mind, and facing certain death. In the context of a Western democratic order that broadly upholds the rule of law, such aberrations tend to be dramatised as flagrant violations. But in the Indian context, the *homo sacer* is not an aberration who is invisible, a tear in the fabric of normality. He is everywhere. He is normality.

The Indian situation is complicated by the fact that this ubiquitous *homo sacer* is made a subject of melodrama and entertainment by a media that has abandoned ethical self-restraint while exploiting its potential as a powerful and responsible mode of representation. This has brought into being a coliseum scenario reminiscent of the gladiatorial reality shows of imperial Rome. Except that these are televisually disseminated rather than organised in a stadium for a physically present audience. But the structural principle is the same: the State and the media collude to compose a spectacle, for a popular audience, from the sordid materials of power asymmetry.

For what is the coliseum ; whether stadial or televisual ; if not the spectacular dramatisation of oppression and injustice, of the complex relationship that binds the tyrannised to the tyrant? The gladiators ; those who were forced to act in the coliseum s reality shows ; were slaves, *de-served*, taken by force from home and hearth, cut away from family, livelihood and country, and guaranteed only the right to die while providing entertainment for Rome s multitudes. It was Caesar s prerogative to decide whether the dispossessed would live or die.

When the State and the media collude to produce such grand spectacles, their subjects are cast into a juridical wasteland where no laws apply and no rights are guaranteed. In the TV discussion fora (which often blur into reality shows) that top the viewership charts in present-day India, for instance, the subject of the discussion is degraded into a theme for gladiatorial exercise. It is voted upon raucously, the anchor yelling and egging the debaters on to ever more flamboyant expressions of rage and mutual contempt. And if the debate should revolve around a real-life issue involving members of the subaltern classes, the person or persons at the heart of the controversy are given virtually no agency. The *homo sacer* ; and I will soon pass on to the specific cases of a subaltern child and a Muslim woman ; is brought into public view forcibly, virtually kidnapped into the show.

I would interpret this situation through the model of competence and performance proposed by J. L. Austin, the philosopher of language, to account for speech-acts: language in its social context, language as it creates or cannot create a ground of social being. All Indian citizens are in theory guaranteed basic freedoms of suffrage, expression, belief and so on by the Constitution, and therefore are formally invested with a civil competence that equips them to enact their political rights. But in reality, the contextual distortions of hierarchy, illiteracy, corruption, violence and so forth are so immense that this civil competence cannot translate into *performative acts of political participation*.

Reading these symptoms correctly, the televisual media have factored this crisis of alienated citizenship into a system of illusions that already includes a mass communication technology, an aesthetic of theatrical entertainment, and a commercial mandate to maximise popularity ratings. As a result, what they offer is the *political performative through play* at the level of melodramatic spectacle and participatory illusionism. These strategic underpinnings are revealed most dramatically by those TV talk shows on which citizen-viewers, seated in the studio as a representative sample of the People, are symbolically joined by those watching the programme at home. These latter are allowed to feel

empowered when they respond, via phone, SMS or email, to opinion polls announced by the TV anchor.

During the last ten years, the Indian televisual media have begun to assert a para-statal role in offering representative and participatory alternatives, basing this role on a recognition and publicising of the State's inadequacies. This shift from democratic participation to televisual spectacle has had baneful consequences. Television has transformed the shape of participatory experience by playing several simultaneous roles, while appealing to the public imagination. *First*, that of political opposition, through interrogative patterns of reporting and comment; *second*, that of a clearing house of opinion, by inviting all shades of opinion, even extreme; and *third*, that of a court of appeal, in which trials by media are conducted in parallel with, and often improperly appropriating, the roles correctly to be played by investigative agencies and the judiciary.

Since no one has challenged this court of appeal role of television; perhaps for fear of appearing to muzzle the newly emergent Fifth Estate, or of generating a precedent for draconian censorship; this habit of appropriation has become greatly inflated.² In recent years, television has even asserted a mimesis of the deliberative prerogatives of the political process. Consider, for instance, the manner in which various satellite TV channels have strategically named their discussion programmes; which seek to manufacture public opinion; in significant ways that mimic the established structure: *We the People* (which echoes the opening line of the preamble of the Constitution of India), *Aap ki Adalat* (Your Court of Law) and *Satyameva Jayate* (Truth Alone Shall Triumph, which is the motto of the Republic). These televisual assemblies, as I have described them elsewhere, began as surrogates for mainstream democratic assemblies, and now almost claim to have displaced them.³

The topics chosen for discussion are never rigorously debated from a nuanced perspective of the polity, society, economy and culture. All shades of opinion are welcomed; with an eye to staging as explosive a spectacle as possible; but the responses of citizen-viewers as well as invited experts are edited in such a way that they cancel each other out. And on taboo or sensitive subjects such as national territoriality, sub-national aspirations or the uniform civil code, all TV discussion programmes; however independently they claim to function; maintain the official line of the State.

One of the most shocking instances of this tendency took place in 2004, when a *panchayat* (village or ethnic council of elders) was conducted *live* on the sets of Zee TV. The programme was titled *Kiski Gudiya?* (Whose Gudiya?; also, by a cruel irony, Whose Doll?) and subtitled *Yeh Kaisa Bandhan?* (What Kind of Bond Is This?).⁴ At the centre of the controversy was Gudiya, an underprivileged Muslim woman from a village in northern India who was confronted with a terrifying perplexity. Her first husband, a soldier who was called up for the 1999 Kargil war soon after their marriage, had gone missing. Officially declared a deserter and thought by his community to have died, he reappeared five years later after having served time as a prisoner-of-war in a Pakistani jail.

Meanwhile Gudiya, under pressure from her family, had remarried and was pregnant by her second husband. She clearly did not want to return to her first husband, but he was

adamant and so were some members of the village *panchayat*. The televisual media sensed great potential in this tragic story: a battle over a woman and her unborn child, that too belonging to the Muslim minority, which offered vistas of controversy involving Muslim personal law. The channel Zee News simulated, in its studios, a *panchayat* that included Gudiya, her two husbands, elders from their village, Muslim religious jurists and, as token participants, members of the All India Muslim Women's Forum.

Thus, a young woman in the eighth month of her pregnancy sat captive while she was put under trial in the mediatic coliseum, turned into an object for the bloodlust of prurient viewers. Abetted and urged on by the ringmaster, a wily female anchor, the terms were set in place: all decisions regarding Gudiya would be taken according to the Sharia (Islamic law), because she happened to be Muslim. In one swoop, they had constructed the subject as a Muslim woman rather than as the citizen of a secular republic, with recourse to secular laws.⁵ The anchor kept reminding the audience that the decisions regarding Gudiya would be taken strictly within the framework of the Sharia; a statement suggesting that the studios of Zee TV had temporarily seceded from the Republic of India to become an Islamic state. Gudiya's wide forehead was branded with slave status. She was forced to return to her first husband.

Death was foretold in those eyes, drained of blood. Putting a woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy under such intense pressure is criminal under any country's law, but the televisual media had already usurped the role of the State and the judiciary. Gudiya had become a *homo sacer*, stripped of her rights as a citizen without the cover of a legal framework. She could be killed with impunity, even if the weapon was media excess. Gudiya died of multiple organ failure in early 2006, leaving behind a baby boy. She was 26 years old.

Gudiya's volition or desire was definitely of no concern to the TV producers, the religious experts, or the programme audience. Her fate was already sealed by the media corporation, intoxicated by its gluttonous appetite for rising TRPs. No one told her that, under Sharia law, she could opt for a separation from her first husband, or that he could divorce her. Members of the women's forum were not allowed to guide her about her rights and privileges under Islamic law. Reality TV shows, it seems, cannot deal with too much reality. What had started as a mock *panchayat* was menacingly transformed into an oppressive reality, an invidious social injustice: the mock court became a kangaroo court.

Many real *panchayats* behave in an equally, if not more, unconstitutional manner; and are gender- and caste-biased; than their mediatic counterparts. It is not surprising, then, that modern media technology deploys a forum like a village council, with all its regressive values, to make a decision about the fate of a vulnerable woman. With the Gudiya case, TV tribalism was born. The programme may have been set up to look like a televisual assembly, but it was a coliseum nonetheless: a coliseum organised to parody and mock the values and methods of judicial due process. The Gudiya case is an unholy precedent: this was the first time that a legal issue pertaining to a personal matter had been decided in reality-TV style in India. Unfortunately, not even the otherwise vocal leftist women's organisations raised a suitably loud protest against this travesty of justice, this blatant subversion of the rule of law.

It is not coincidental that Gudiya was brought like a slave from the peripheries to entertain middle-class city audiences, when very few homes in her husband's village have electricity, leave alone a TV set.

Another *homo sacer* recently entered this scenario of deafening cheerleaders and scrambling TRP-watchers: Budhia Singh, a four-year-old boy from the eastern Indian state of Orissa, who had been prepared for the kill both by the televisual and the print media.⁶ In May 2006, we watched this frail child in an oversize T-shirt and fairytale red shoes running a marathon sponsored by the Central Police Reserve Force. He found mention in the *Limca Book of Records* for running 65 km in 7.02 hours. His coach, a man possessed by ambition, would have run him to the ground, had he not finally slowed down, gasped in breathlessness and vomited. With his limbs thrashing helplessly, the boy was whisked away into a car.

Budhia soon became a national sensation, with the Chief Minister of Orissa, the state's Governor, and its Sports and Youth Services Minister supporting his feat. The only protest came from the head of the Ministry of Woman and Child Development, who opposed the coach for exploiting the child so cynically. But with such high-profile support for the coach, this voice of sanity was easily drowned.

Most TV channels presented the Budhia story as a debate on whether a child so talented should be allowed to run a marathon or not, at his age. Important issues such as the fact that the coach had *bought* Budhia from a vendor, who in turn had *bought* him for Rs 800 from his impoverished mother who had three other children to feed, were underplayed. That Budhia was a child slave who was too young to be aware of his rights was not even raised as a niggling doubt on any of the channels. That Budhia could die of heart failure or suffer growth retardation if forced to continue to run unbearably long distances was dismissed as a side issue. People, interviewed off the street by various TV channels, expressed the noble sentiment that the boy should run for India, and that his talent should not be snuffed out. That runners below an acceptable age do not qualify for the physically demanding, marathon-length race has escaped these citizens. That the boy is not a free agent, but a freak on show, has similarly escaped them. What makes it worse is that Budhia, who is said to be sprinting towards modernity, is in truth a victim of the most feudal relationship of oppression that is being reissued in contemporary form.

Thus, the political surrogacy that televisual assemblies offer is operative only at the level of cathartic wish-fulfilment. It may at best articulate the feelings of an alienated citizenship that is mainly urban and middle-class; but it certainly cannot express the wishes of the vast, disenfranchised multitudes that occupy the swollen margins. Nor can such televisual assemblies propose a serious alternative to the established; even if fossilised or distorted; processes of democracy. A truly vibrant alternative would have to base itself on a sustained systemic critique of the polity, and a consequent activation of the public sphere by more critical and inclusive means. Media corporations and their programming experts cannot possibly deliver this mandate; it has no commercial resonance for them.

II.

I now move on to the possibility of transforming the figure of the *homo sacer*, who is constructed as an object by other people's discourses, into a self-empowered *subject*, an autonomous agent who can express her/his needs and wishes. For this, we have to move from the mediatic coliseum to those points of intersection where contemporary Indian artists have formed solidarities with colleagues active in disciplines such as new media, documentary filmmaking and activism.

Some Indian artists have attempted, through efforts of collaboration, to probe and disclose systemic hegemonies and distortions; they have made interventions in areas where citizens are not in a position to perform their citizenship. They have deployed a vocabulary that plays across a spectrum of modes ranging from irony to radical critique, through methods that are oblique and allusive but never lose sight of their objective.

I will concentrate on two collaborative projects: namely Sarai-CSDS + Ankur's Cybermohalla, where young adults in urban slums interact with new media practitioners to create ongoing streams of expression, and the interventions initiated by the artist Navjot Altaf with local art practitioners in rural areas. Both projects are concerned with subjectivities that emerge from below the line of visibility, both in socio-political and art-historical terms. Both projects propose an art outside the conventional parameters of art history; they also point to a recovery of the public sphere by possibly utopian means, by the use of novel forms of dialogic pedagogy and democratic communication. These are vibrant examples of material empowerment and imaginative emancipation through collaborative processes across the lines of class and cultural assumptions.

Significantly, in these projects, the device of intervention does not replay the donor-recipient relationship enshrined in conventional NGO activity. Both in Cybermohalla and in Navjot's project, communication is lateral rather than hierarchical; and the specificity of location is not emphasised to entrench victimhood or oppression, but instead serves as a basis for a synergistic exploration. The basis of interaction is a mutuality of commitment.

The Cybermohalla project (<http://www.sarai.net/cybermohalla/cybermohalla.htm>) can be seen as a process of self-empowerment generated through the socialisation of technology in a particular ethos. Five years ago, Sarai, a new media initiative and a programme of CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) along with the NGO Ankur/Society for Alternatives in Education, set up five media labs in Delhi's urban slum clusters. In these media labs, young practitioners belonging to different social and educational backgrounds have been exploring the phenomenology of the technological act, as performed in the interstices between pedagogy and creativity. Through their various expressions; computer animations, digital photography, sound recordings, online discussion lists and texts, broadsheets, collages and posters; they examine the web of everyday life in urban neighbourhoods (*mohalla*, in Urdu), creating a richly detailed architecture of the colloquial. Their online and offline conversations are presented not as neutral information describing urban Indian reality, but as technologically-enabled cultural production that is inventive and idiosyncratic.

Imagine a *mohalla*, a neighbourhood where news filters in at different velocities and frequencies, where rumours are artworks, where secrets are shared, where intimacy is both cloying and comforting, where communitarian identities are maintained yet creatively bent^a The cellular structure of a *mohalla* would be an instructive metaphor for the variousness of the conversations that take place among these practitioners. How does one enter into this meta-site, a place that is invisible both to the mainstream art world and to quick-fix NGOs working on issues related to the digital divide?

As if anticipating this question, a set of texts by the practitioners is titled, *Before Coming Here Had You Thought of a Place Like This?*^f Here, Yashoda writes: But what can be said of glances that are not from strangers, but well-wishers? They seem unfamiliar sometimes. What are these looks? They leave a trace of suffocation in my life which otherwise seems to be going on just right. Even if I want to tell others about these looks, I can't. Because I don't understand them myself. Because in the courthouse of glances, there are no eyewitnesses^{f7}.

Yashoda's poetic take on the eyewitnesses^f of urban anthropology proposes a scenario where the glance is itself under investigation. Indeed, whose testimony can be trusted when every eye is culpable? Where no glance can be judged or vindicated, privileged or debarred, a conversation among equals takes place: a *samvad*. But even in such a conversation, Sometimes things flow in relationships, and sometimes they become still. Many relationships don't even have a name^a^{f8}

The tone of these texts or broadsheets is reflective, never forced or contrived. The literary pace is one of teasing out the nuances of a situation by intuitive means. The subject speaks with pride, dignity, heartbreak, humour and folk wisdom, but never as a supplicant or a victim waiting to be heard. The writers of the Cybermohalla speak for themselves, and not for some imaginary public that may or may not listen to them. This is a far cry from the predetermined framing of the subject in a mediatic coliseum. These speech-acts are veined with the responsive and responsible tonality of confidence that only a participant can bring to a conversation ; as against a passive consumer, or a deluded monologist, or a puppet playacting to a script. These speech-acts have the unmistakable quality of the performative as it thinks itself into the critical mass and specific gravity of existence. The quality of observation, inquiry and phrasing in these texts is remarkably fresh: it avoids the aridity of the statistical, the sloganeering of newly raised consciousness and the baroque flourishes of literary excess. As Shamsher Ali writes: ^ato go into the depths of thinking, we need a pass, and the name of that permit is QUESTION^a^{f9}

This project produces an archive of knowledge and insight, a primer of recall and foresight. Local histories are unlocked, street maps are redrawn from memory, desire and accident. The young practitioners enter the subjectivity of the survivor ; whether it is the cable operator or a sewage cleaner or a girl about to be married, all of whom are trying to crack the code of the urban condition, walking the tightrope of systemic imbalances.

Apart from becoming available as the residue of internal communication among the locality media labs, this project material has also found avatars in the world beyond the

project's sociality. It has been deployed in artworks, in multimedia installations where the archive becomes the found material. Consider the digital photographs of mirrored reflections, portraits and inanimate objects in the neighbourhood. By zooming deep into the image, the boundaries of legibility are pushed until the pixilated squares of differing tones create a definitional blur, an abstraction. This dodge in representation holds a parable for the viewer: by moving closer into an image or a life-world, we do not necessarily comprehend it better. Distance and discernment are equally important tools towards understanding.

The creativity of the Cybermohalla project is in a very material and immediate sense an act of resistance in the face of oppression. Even as texts are written and circulated in the media labs, we hear the grinding jaws of bulldozers and see the build-up of police formations. Delhi's squatter settlements are being destroyed, families are being uprooted; bricks are being recycled for a handful of coins. And yet, the Cybermohalla practitioners continue to write, make images, dream and resist.

Indeed, in times of crisis, the participants in the Cybermohalla project speak in voices that are sure and certain, not allusive or hesitant. During the recent slum demolitions in Delhi, one of Cybermohalla's media labs at Nangla Maanchi was demolished. The young practitioners began to share information about this crisis through broadsheets and ongoing blogs. They became, in that much-favoured term of today's TV journalism, citizen journalists. They questioned the role of the State and its agencies, the judiciary and the police; they have created a series of powerful vignettes describing the losses incurred by the inhabitants.

One of the blog entries records the statement made by Justice Ruma Pal, while dismissing the stay petition in the Supreme Court against the demolitions at Nangla Maanchi: Desperation does not mean they will do something illegal^a In India we have three weather conditions ; heat, rain and winter. If we accept your argument, there will be no appropriate time to demolish illegal structures^a nobody forced you to come to Delhi^a Stay where you can. If encroachments on public land are to be allowed, there will be anarchyf.

When the rural hinterland is submerged in debt traps and crop failures, when the urban future has been mortgaged to the big real estate and housing developers, where are the marginal to find a home ; the *makaan* in the trilogic promise of *roti, kapda aur makaan* (food, clothing and shelter) that the ruling Congress Party has held out like a talisman to the poor in its election manifestos through the decades? The poor leave their village homes because the countryside has been destroyed by rapacity and indifference; to send them back there is to push them into the blasted heath where Lear's unaccommodated man must take his chances.

As against the judge's summary reduction of citizens to the condition of *homo sacer*, Shamsher writes movingly in the blog, discussing the legal/illegal status of the slum-dwellers: Inside all those places, which are termed illegal by the government, is a different story. The government plants the stake of its stamp on a place ; This is government

property. And in response, we place our small bundles of receipts and papers gathered from past time till today. But still, we are shunned, because the world moves on the basis of documents^{af10}

Such mature, authentic articulations of performative citizenship are far more valuable than the tokenistic posturing of the mediatic coliseum or the lazy and irresponsible rhetoric of blogger s parks, as the now-technologised battle to renew the foundational pledges of the republic continues.

III.

Cybermohalla symbolises a politics of belonging, of finding purchase ; a foothold, however small ; for oneself in the polity, or of vocalising one s position in a collective conversation. In interpreting this phenomenon, I would stress that the coalitions represented by the Cybermohalla project and Navjot s activities have in different ways emplaced themselves in relation to the coalitions of the powerful, which maraud and encroach upon the rights of the marginal. These projects have demonstrated that, instead of retreating into the charity-seeking modes of victimology, those in resistance can transform the circumstances of their marginality into a coign of vantage.

This is achieved when the more privileged collaborators in the project assist their marginal, subaltern, hitherto voiceless and unheard colleagues to position themselves in a location of articulate engagement ; one that takes them outside the circumscribed political and cultural possibilities attendant on their normal location in the social configuration. Thus emplaced, these newly empowered agents can forge strategic alliances with new disciplines and renew the frameworks by which they are viewed; they can also re-negotiate the terms by which their role is read, by which value is assigned to them, and by which the history of their old and newly chosen positions is represented.¹¹

Navjot Altaf s art is not founded on the creation of individual masterpieces. It has been premised, instead, on the act of searching, plotting and re-structuring the course of meaning through a life of projects ; where her riskiest wager is placed not on achieved style or finished product, but on that tricky shape-shifter, the self. Over the last 30 years, Navjot has worked in a diverse and impressive array of media ranging from painting and sculpture to inter-media installations comprising elements of sculpture, video, sound and text. During the 1970s, she played her role as a member of the first generation of artists who sought out a viewership beyond the art world, in mill-worker neighbourhoods, mining towns and railway stations. Since the early 1990s, she has worked in collaboration with artists from other disciplines and other milieus; these experiments have resulted in gallery-based sculpture and also in site-specific cooperative or collaborative installations with artists of rural background.

The consistent updating of her ideological stand has been reflected in periodic alterations in her choice of media and form. Her changing relationship with Marxist praxis illustrates this theme. While the leftist imperative to demonstrate solidarity with the working class impelled her to show art in public spaces in proletarian neighbourhoods in the 1970s, she gradually came to realise that orthodox Marxism constrains its exponents with certain

limitations. Operating from a consciousness of her womanhood through the 1980s, she outgrew her orthodox Marxist orientation, which privileged questions of class while denying the equal significance of caste, ethnicity and gender.

Navjot's engagement with rural reality and artists of tribal background in the 1990s marks yet another interrogation of her early Marxist position, which had foregrounded urban proletarian reality over other subaltern lifeworlds, and situated the vanguard of resistance in the metropolis rather than the village. This constant political alertness has sensitised Navjot greatly to the problems of working together: while working on projects with artists of subaltern background, she always remains aware of the asymmetries of entitlement and opportunity that inform all such relationships.

In the late 1990s, Navjot initiated a project to interact with artists of tribal background in Kondagaon, in Central India's Bastar district, where she was concerned with the problematics of collaboration, not its celebration¹². She did not immediately push for a collaboration with them; instead, she tried to locate their practices of stone, metal and wood carving against the larger contexts of State patronage for the crafts, social hierarchies and patriarchal biases, as well as the possibility of an intervention made by a metropolitan artist (with a fine-arts background like herself) who had been taught to dismiss the crafts as a hereditary skill. The project began with the redefining the terminology of art/craft and artist/craftsperson in the context of art history¹³.

The tribal artists have made individual sculptures at the workshops facilitated by Navjot, while site-specific projects between her and her colleagues have resulted in cooperative works such as *Pilla Gudis*, (Temples for Children), and Nalpar, the redesigning of public utility spaces from women at hand-pump sites. The *Pilla Gudis*, designed by Shantibai, Rajkumar, Gessuram and Navjot, became extra-curricular spaces where children could interact with one other, and with visiting musicians and artists. Rajkumar designed one at Kusma in 2000. A structure based on the wooden temple form, without the omnipresent divinities, it has mirrors placed between the rafters. The children have only to look up, to amuse themselves with their own multiple reflections. Apart from the sheer pleasure it provides, this structure is, metaphorically, a way of opening oneself to unexpected stimuli while retaining one's cultural balance.

One of the strongest works to emerge from this project is Shantibai's sculptural self-portrait, posing as a sculptor, holding a hammer close to her heart. Shantibai gradually vacated the socially ascribed identity of a pushover wife or underprivileged tribal woman, and won for herself a position of artistic agency. But Shantibai's personal growth does not register easily in the Indian art world, which still sees her as a puppet of destiny rather than as an agent impelled by her own will. This has not dejected her; their dialogue was never meant to be limited to the sale of artworks. Such solidarity has already achieved a movement away from the circumscribed art world, and towards a more engaging lifeworld. Neither a user nor a do-gooder, Navjot has entered into a symbiotic relationship with the rural community and its environment and emplaces herself as artist-activist in the full awareness of the differences that are inherent in all such collaborations.

When the sculptures of Navjot's colleagues were first shown in mainstream art galleries, some viewers ridiculed them for copying Navjot's style of sculpture-making. To which Navjot had responded, but my own work takes from Adivasi, Mayan and African sources^f. It is strange that, after a considerable passage of time and Navjot's courageous struggle in figuring the conceptual abstractions inherent in the representation of the other, her own video installations seem to be exploring a poetics of abstraction. Her videos are layered, blurred testimonies of many beleaguered voices, but they are also contained in mathematically precise rhythmic structures. In this tense, vulnerable moment; mapping her own long-unspoken interests as an artist, interests that do not necessarily coincide with her more overtly political concerns; a new poetics has emerged in Navjot's work. This records the triumph of a genuinely dialogic process, in the course of which Navjot has emancipated herself as an image-maker from the dominance of the political; without compromising her commitment to the mutuality and solidarity that sustain her project in Bastar. The connection between the artist-as-interventionist and the *homo sacer* comes full circle; emancipation is a feedback loop, it transforms all who perform and participate in it.

NOTES

1. Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Transl. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998, Stanford).
2. See Barkha Dutt, Remote Control^f (*The Hindustan Times*, Mumbai, 8 July 2006, p. 8). Dutt, managing editor of the channel NDTV 24 x 7, comments on the proposed Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill (2006). A draft of the legislation was scheduled to be tabled in Parliament at the time of writing this essay.
3. See Nancy Adajania, Anchored Illusions, Floating Realities: Two Mediatic Claims on the Public Sphere^f (text of lecture presented at the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, September 2003). In an electoral setting where conventional political mobilisation has degenerated into the securing of a mass base by appeal to retrograde ethnic/religious/regional sentiments, an ambiguous proposal is made through the programming of media corporations; they propose what I will read as forms of televisual assembly, in which media corporations assert their ability to provide a true representation of the public will and therefore set themselves up as an alternative to the constituted fora of a democratic discussion and governance. In fact, what is brashly offered as an alternative is a surrogate^f.
4. See T.K. Rajalakshmi, Televised Trauma^f, *Frontline*, 22 October 2004; see also Poornima Joshi, The Media's Toy^f, *Outlook*, 4 October 2004.
5. In this context, see Vikhar Ahmed Sayeed, The Fatwa in Journalism^f, Sarai Reader-list posting, 3 July 2006. <https://mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/>
6. See Prafulla Das, A Step Too Far^f, *Frontline*, 2 June 2006.
7. Yashoda. Dilli Gate^f. In *If We Were to Stand in Front of a Crowd, What Would the Eyes of the Crowd Say to Us?* Cybermohalla booklet (2003). <http://www.sarai.net/community/cybermohalla/book02/pages/pdfs/eyescrowd.pdf>
8. Neelofar. Relationships^f. In *Conversations in Questions and Answers and Conversations without Questions and Answers*. Cybermohalla booklet (2003). <http://www.sarai.net/community/cybermohalla/book02/pages/pdfs/conversation.pdf>

9. Shamsheer Ali. The Edges of Questions. In *Method Is That Heavy Thing Which Makes Everything Light?* Cybermohalla booklet (2003).
<http://www.sarai.net/community/cybermohalla/book02/pages/pdfs/questions/pdf>
10. Shamsheer Ali. A Place to Dwell [The Journey After]. Blog entry, 10 June 2006.
<http://nangla.freeflux.net/> (English); <http://nangla-maachi.freeflux.net> (Hindi)
11. See Nancy Adajania, Another look at Displacement: Emplacement versus Emplasures. Catalogue essay for Navjot Altaf's exhibition *Displaced Self*, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai, 2003.
12. Nancy Adajania. Dialogues on Representation. In *The Hindu*, 16 February 2003.
13. Ibid.

Be Offended, Be Very Offended

LINDA CARROLI

Against this fear, art is fresh healing and fresh pain.
; Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects*

Why are images increasingly confused with reality? The real has assumed greater significance in contemporary art over the past few decades. However, the real, as it is represented in art's critical engagement with social issues, is never complete, but rather often cynical and ambiguous. Reflecting on two recent 'art controversies' ; Australia Council funding in 2003 for a new media art project, *Escape from Woomera*,¹ and the furore that same year over Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award winner Richard Bell's T-shirt slogan ; it becomes apparent that the image is caught in a trap of literalism. In sharpening our senses for moral conflict, these artists and artworks have been singled out for a mode of censure in which virtuality has been confused with reality.

Sociologist Steven C. Dubin argues that "two elements are required for art controversies to erupt: there must be a sense that values have been threatened, and power must be mobilised in response to do something about it"². Those mobilisations can include governmental attempts to regulate symbolic expression. The media plays a large part in fuelling these controversies, and this essay canvasses the reporting of the Bell and *Escape from Woomera* cases.

While *Woomera* lasted a mere few days, media commentary about Bell kicked on for several weeks. The *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper broke the *Escape from Woomera* news as a front-page story.³ Then Minister for Immigration, Phillip Ruddock, voiced his

objection on the basis of the granting of federal funding for an artwork that was critical of the government's policy on the issue of detention of asylum seekers and refugees. Ruddock also commented that the decision to fund "reflected poorly on the Australia Council". A ministerial spokesperson confirmed that the Australia Council would be contacted to "express a fairly firm view about the allocation of [its] resources"⁴. Arm's-length funding mechanisms, such as the Australia Council, are intended to enhance democratic values and expressions rather than encourage unilateral policy support. Based on peer assessment, the Australia Council art form boards are intended as a forum for decision-making founded on expert view. A representative of the New Media Arts Board reiterated that the project proposal was a sound one with artistic merit.

Later in 2003, Richard Bell, the first urban Aboriginal artist to win the Telstra Award in its 20-year history, wore a limited-edition T-shirt to his award ceremony, emblazoned with his slogan "White girls can't hump"⁵. This tabloid-style sloganeering, ordinarily a tightly wound compression of a seriously burning issue, was also one of Bell's artworks. Post-modern irony aside, as a statement Bell's text is perplexing, and the artist conceded that it was "an absurd thing to say⁶[but] it's up to people to look"⁶. Most obviously, the text is a take on the American feature film title *White Men Can't Jump* (1992), evincing the complex interplay of sexuality, race, power and colonialism. When read literally and in isolation, these words might appear offensive to individual sensitivities. As a result, some demanded that Bell, now undeserving of his award, return his prize money, while others demanded a public apology for the offence caused. However, as the controversy wore on, Bell explained that the text was an attempt to consider child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities (a fraught contemporary issue not further explored in this synoptic narration of the Bell controversy), rather than cast aspersions on the sexual prowess of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women.

As the artist's explanation is drowned out in a cacophony of complaint and insinuation, how might we account for diverse and contradictory acts of critical judgement? Or for clashes of interpretation and intent? In a turbulent and subjective interpretative ethos, how can any single telling or explanation be held as the true one?

Bell found himself embroiled in a Fanonian drama of power relations between black man and white woman ; although, significantly, Indigenous women also made public statements about the effect of Bell's artwork ; but surely there is more going on here, when ideas about virtue and taste are upheld in the realm of sexual and racial politics.



but is it art?

While these scenarios uncomfortably unfolded, artists and commentators found it necessary to make a distinction between 'art' and 'real life'. For sure, an art object has its own materiality; it is a physical object as well as a representation. The *Escape from*



Woomera artists are clearly sympathetic to the appalling situation of detainees, and their work seeks to raise awareness of the conditions in these detention centres. However, a representation of a detainee breaking out of prison, or a gamer playing the role of a virtual escapee, is not the same as advocating or

committing such actions. Overarching principles in gaming include point of view, role-play and identification. There are particular aesthetic and narrative imperatives that drive the artwork. Matt Adams of Blast Theory, a UK artist group using interactive media to explore the relationship between real and virtual space, said that *Escape from Woomera* "poses many questions about who we identify with and why when we play games. At the moment, games such as this often attract opprobrium for combining games with serious issues. They are seen as trivialising important political questions. I see this in reverse: they bring a long overdue seriousness to games"⁷. This view is significant, because one of the grounds for criticising the funding outcome was that a game could not be considered art, despite a panel of peers having made the decision to fund the work.

In Bell's case, the inscription of the slogan doesn't make it true. Given the artist's satirical quizzing of interracial sexual and power relations in his work, the literal reading of the words caused the viewers to overlook ingrained issues of nation, race, violence and gender. Human Rights Commissioner Pru Goward's demand for an apology seemed an act of velleity. In demanding this apology on the basis of an alleged offending breach of community standards, and in calling on 'Aboriginal leaders' to rebuke Bell, did she appreciate the irony of the Australian government's refusal to apologise to Indigenous people? Whose offence or standards matter most in this variance? And these are the troubling questions, the double standards, which this artwork brought into sharp relief. When whiteness and/or womanhood are imbued with privileged cultural value and virtue, the moral high ground isn't easily wrested. This equation of whiteness with morality was reinforced when Prime Minister Howard was interviewed on talkback radio and referred to the artwork as "tasteless"^a I think we should have more taste"⁸.

A game about the detention of asylum seekers isn't simply child's play; an exercise in wordplay isn't simply a tasteless pun. Real things are happening here. The realness of art

can lie in our reactions to it. And that is the obvious point of these artworks ; they cut to the heart of the matter. They construct ranking questions that challenge any possibility of a ready moral or censorious stance in response to outrageous acts and vividly serious matters. However, in the case of Bell, furore over the T-shirt cast a shadow across his award-winning painting and manifesto, *Scientia e Metaphysica (Bell's Theorem)*, which pointedly critiqued the cultural and financial exploitation of Indigenous artists in the art market with the proclamation "Aboriginal art ; it's a white thing". The T-shirt might be seen as a distraction. Even though the panel that decided the Telstra Award was comprised of nationally respected arts experts, there was another bloated 'is it art?' retort when art critic Susan McCulloch of the *Australian* newspaper described Bell's prize-winning work as derivative and outdated. Stating her preference for a particular kind of 'Aboriginal' style, such criticism played into the lived reality of *Bell's Theorem*.⁹

i am, you are, we are unaustralian

As the federal government considered introducing sedition provisions as part of its anti-terrorism bill (passed into law on 6 December 2005 after debate was gagged), these issues became more pressing. When I initially started thinking about this text, my intention was to write about these artists and their work in the context of current race relations and their implications for nation or nationalism, addressing cultural critic Joseph Pugliese's idea of the 'unAustralian' as a category of exclusion. Both artists discussed in this essay address issues surrounding the construction of white nationhood, of whiteness as the true expression of Australianness. As Pugliese notes, the accusation of "unAustralian' functions in disciplinary and coercive ways that work to discredit and censor individuals or groups that publicly question and contest government policy"¹⁰. Predicated on an 'us and them' mentality, the 'unAustralian' denotes someone who does not conform to the dominant culture. In variously discursive ways, allegations of 'unAustralian' were levelled at *Escape from Woomera* and Richard Bell. Theirs is an unAustralianness that Pugliese describes as having been adopted with some pride as "signifying a different order of nation ; a locus, ironically, 'excised' from the nation that enables^a an ongoing commitment to a supra-national ethics of welcome, hospitality and non-violence"¹¹. *Escape from Woomera* is more readily understood within this frame, and together with other artistic acts seeks to create hospitable and liberated spaces for asylum seekers and refugees.

There is an attempt to distance ourselves from the punitive actions of the Howard government by constructing an 'other space', in which other presents and futures are possible. This is a space I call 'xenotopia', a kind of striated not-here-but-here. It is an imagined and unknowable place for/of others or strangers that sweeps across the spaces of alternative (or ethical) community, exile and containment. Curator and writer Djon Mundine observed that white Australia selectively claims, perhaps consumes, Aboriginal public figures as its own ; 'our Cathy [Freeman, the Olympic sprinter]', but not 'our Richard [Bell]'¹². Owning, claiming and consuming Indigenous culture, land and peoples is the stuff of assimilation, of permitting entry on provisional grounds. Goward wanted to make Bell accountable. In her response to Bell's slogan,

she said, "it's got to be understood that the law and cultural standards have to be upheld by everyone in Australia, regardless of colour and creed"¹³.

But what does it mean for Indigenous people to be un/Australian? Having flaunted the rules in such an unpalatable and unassimilable manner, having exposed trenchant double standards, Bell apparently sealed his unAustralianness, and this is rather meaningless in Bell's oeuvre. As art critic and historian Morgan Thomas explains of Bell's work *Worth Exploring* (2002), the overriding factor is the "illegality of the white occupation of Australia, taking this illegality as the premise for the claim that everything subsequent to this occupation is *ultra vires* (illegal, outside the law), and drawing the consequence that all non-Aboriginal Australians must be counted as criminals and all Aboriginal people recognised as the victims of crime"¹⁴. In being outside the law, all non-Aboriginal ; or unAboriginal people ; are thoroughly implicated.¹⁵

The provisions of the recent anti-terror laws shift the emphasis, bringing this question of nationalism into sharper view. When I started writing this essay, the controversies and the questions evoked, while important, existed in a less urgent frame. The acts and utterances of these artists were not offences potentially punishable by imprisonment. The war against terror hadn't yet inured as a war against this country's citizens. The intricate coupling of security and fear makes this inflation of hostility towards 'unAustralians' more compelling. 'They' are destroying 'our' way of life ; such logic extends into a kind of mobilisation against and weeding out of the enemy within. When initially drafted, the anti-terror provisions for "seditious intent" had the potential to ensnare artists whose work might be construed as "bringing the Sovereign into hatred and contempt", "urging disaffection against the Constitution, the Government of the Commonwealth, either House of Parliament", and "promoting feelings of ill-will or hostility between different groups so as to threaten the peace, order and good governance of the Commonwealth". "Recklessness" was also factored into several sedition provisions. While there was some provision for acts done in "good faith", the greatest threat to artists would have been interpretative acts arising from distrust of images or proffering literalism as the measure of image. Artists and art, in this era of fundamentalism and literalism, are easy targets: the good faith provision in the anti-terror legislation does not acknowledge artists or artworks.

In this light, *Escape from Woomera* is particularly relevant given that it is an artist-devised computer game in which players take on the roles of escaping detention centre inmates. Mandatory detention of refugees and asylum seekers is regarded as integral to national security. It is one of the most divisive issues in the Australian polity. One of Ruddock's criticisms of the game was that it encouraged participation in illegal activities. However, this reaction seems like an arbitrary ruse, given that illegal activities are also featured in best-selling games, such as *Grand Theft Auto III* that involves car theft, violence and murder. Under the anti-terror legislation, artists could be vulnerable when criticising the issues, government and politics of the day. According to Ruddock, currently Attorney General, the crux is now, with some qualification of sedition included in the law, the urging of hostility or violence towards the government.¹⁶

How might we legally define "urging"? Given that I am discussing situations where representing an act is regarded as tantamount to urging that act, is urging an act the same as doing it or, worse, does representing an act equate with doing it? Applying the distinction of philosopher J.L. Austin, language (and, arguably, any representation) is not only used to state facts, but also to perform actions. Austin identifies "performatives", whereby "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action ; it is not normally thought of as just saying something"¹⁷. How do we distinguish the enunciative and the performative in alleged acts of sedition predicated on urging?

truth or dare

In the onslaught of literalism, the open-endedness of interpretation and imagination is unceremoniously severed. Author and critic Wendy Steiner argues that the arts have been made vulnerable because the virtuality of the image has been lost to literalism, and that this feeds uncertainties about visual representation, thinking and ideas. This virtual realm, according to Steiner, suggests that art is "neither identical to reality nor isolated from it, but^a tied to the world by acts of interpretation"¹⁸. Says Steiner: "^ain this literalism, this fundamentalist scare story, the artwork is not invested by its audience with a virtual power, but possesses, itself, a power that we cannot control^a we must reconceive the power of art as neither a formalist enthrallment nor a fundamentalist nightmare"¹⁹.

We now live in a world saturated by media and images; and, as writer David Hickey stresses, "works of art in this culture do not have determinate or discoverable meanings"²⁰.



Steiner similarly insists that partly due to the unstable realm of images and subjective nature of interpretation, expertise in the arts, whether as artist or critic, is resisted, often buried in a mire of anti-intellectualism. Subsequently, the message is often lost to literal interpretations. Representations of events are read as the sanctioning of those events ; though to represent something is not the same as advocating for it. Yet, as Dubin notes, since the 1960s, "the burden of explaining this increasingly complex art scene has fallen to contemporary art critics"²¹. Steiner observes that "outside of journalism, there is no sphere in which aesthetic value and pleasure are discussed with any regularity"²² ; at least not on a mass scale. However, the media²³ tend to blow hot and cold about art and arts issues, regularly erupting with outrage and miscomprehension over funding outcomes; and, in some instances, dogging artists who have received arts grants in a country where incomes derived from artistic practice are about 15% of the nation's average wage.

How well equipped are we to deal with and live with this virtual world of art when, as one art critic has claimed, our visual education ends by the age of seven? As Steiner argues:

With the best of intentions, professors teach contemporary art with all its humour, paradox, and occasional provocation, hoping to promote pleasure and an understanding of the world through an understanding of a crucial part of it ; representation⁸ But for opponents of the liberal academy, complexity and ambiguity are merely mystifications, and contemporary art in fact compounds social disorder. The world's ills should be overcome instead by the enforcement of hierarchies and systems inherited from the past, with art fulfilling its social mission by bolstering and justifying these systems.²⁴

who said that?

Historically, sedition laws have been used as tools of arbitrary persecution and oppression. Sedition privileges the protection of government, and in so doing curtails the freedoms of expression and individual liberty. While Australia is signatory to several international human rights conventions, and while the Commonwealth and state governments have introduced legislation that confers some rights of equality, this country has stopped short of introducing a Bill of Rights as a constitutional amendment. In Australia, human rights are undecided at the level of legislature and government. Rights of free speech do not have any legal or constitutional foundation in this country ; they are a matter of principle.

Despite the problematic and universalising nature of rights discourse, under the current government the lack of these provisions is sorely felt. Given the reticence of the federal government to enshrine rights constitutionally, Australians can lay only tenuous or 'in principle' claim to inalienable rights. Subsequently, in this country, judicial recourse in the event of incursion of supposed breaches of rights is non-existent. According to Amnesty International, the proposed anti-terror laws have the effect of undermining the liberal democratic values they are designed to protect. When issues of freedom of speech and the



right to dissent are weighed against sedition in the context of Australian democracy, a discourse of human rights as it applies to civil liberties and artistic freedom is generally upheld. The *Australian* reported that "our parliamentary democracy is underpinned by a free press and the right of citizens to tell the government of the day that it is wrong"²⁵. But on what legislative grounds?

By late November 2005, a Senate committee had recommended that the sedition provisions of the proposed anti-terror law be scrapped. The government refused to budge, although pledged to review the legislation after it was enacted. The *Australian* reported that, additional to the 'good faith' clause, "sedition laws will contain a new 'public interest' defence to reflect the concerns of media outlets and Coalition MPs that the provisions could harm free speech"²⁶. In this respect, the legislative change does little to protect artists. Also, this attempt at qualification seems to define one set of woolly terms with another; what is the "public interest"? The good faith defence is not applicable if a person has urged force or violence. While calls to review the legislation persist, as does a view that sedition laws are unwarranted,²⁷ Ruddock said those provisions are "designed to protect the community from those who would abuse our democratic values and threaten our harmonious and tolerant society"²⁸. More importantly, the government has rapidly legislated for the removal and erosion of rights, while it has consistently manipulated and back-pedalled on constitutional reform issues such as a referendum on a Bill of Rights.

How does the government, given the distrustful demeanour of the present political environment, countenance its own actions as "urgings" towards civil disobedience and hostility? The process of legislating representation, the effective outcome of sedition laws, is seriously fraught, given that representation is comprised of thought experiments. There are few attempts to engender broader understanding of the instability of art and image in our society, and some of the media attention art receives evinces this instability. Because images are so pervasive, our visual literacy is constantly under challenge and our faculties of interpretation are pushed to new understandings. Subsequently, there is a need to call on ever-refined abilities to differentiate real from virtual.

There is a view I hear from time to time: that art does nothing and that it changes nothing. However, this view is exposed as fallacious when art is attacked, usually on spurious grounds, and when commentators of various political persuasions consider the ramifications of regulating or outlawing the thought, dialogue and pleasure that come of art. At these times, we become acutely aware of the power of the symbolic, and the ways that art provokes and produces. There is something incommensurable about art, a kind of uncertainty that promises nothing. It's the sort of uncertainty that doesn't sit well in the fear-infested drives of literalism and fundamentalism. If ministerial, media and public responses to dissent and difference (such as those conjured in response to *Escape from Woomera* and Richard Bell) are any indication, then both the ability to differentiate and the willingness to negotiate the real and virtual are still remote.

I'm not arguing that every decision made in or about the arts should pass quietly by without any scrutiny or debate. It is through these discussions that we might come to

reiterate the value of art and virtuality, or even conceptualise cultural transformation or renewal. However, the confused and incendiary interpretations of contemporary images and intent have fuelled controversy, and intensified the calls to deal with those two offenders (as transgressors of the racialised boundaries around the construction of nation) in an overtly castigatory manner.

Only a few years past, it's not a leap to speculate about the deteriorated circumstances in which these representations can be regarded as seditious or dangerously subversive²⁹. Could we have surmised in 2003 that artists would be campaigning to defend a fundamental of civil liberty? Since then, *Escape from Woomera* has been exhibited without further incident, and Richard Bell continues to produce and sell work. While there are innumerable observations to be made and conclusions to be drawn from these two art controversies, this essay serves to situate and reflect on the particularly problematised nature of representation today. In those moments of intensity, we witnessed a knotted conflation of issues and responses that shine the spotlight on arts funding, art markets, virtuality, aesthetics, race and gender issues, public policy, nationalism, citizenship, and more. This is the sort of rippling (or symptom) that should move us to ask serious, probing questions about the vitality of our democracy, national identity and public culture.

Quite possibly it's only out of art, as a kind of 'thought space' riddled with dubiety, that this foment is likely; where the virtual and the real demonstrate their separate-togetherness, their permeability. It is not a simple binary ; we are thoroughly enmeshed ; the virtual is not only bound to the real, but the real also finds its articulation in the virtual. In the unfurling of these two controversies, specific artworks were received in ways that demonstrate their significance; and also their capacity to create pleasure, highlighting one of the many roles of art in the stark reality of these times. Such artworks encourage us to feel, to see, and to play ; to experience the kind of delight that comes of provocative visual thinking, reckless irreverence and quick-witted urgings.

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NOTES

1. *Escape from Woomera* website. See <http://www.escapefromwoomera.org>
2. Steven C. Dubin. *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions* (Routledge, 1992, New York), p. 6.
3. Sean Nicholls. "Escape game wires the minister". In *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 August 2003.
4. Ibid.
5. Much of Bell's work is comprised of uncompromising statements, including "I AM NOT SORRY", "I AM HUMILIATED" and "A LIE FOR A LIE AND A MYTH FOR A MYTH". The texts can appear as paintings, T-shirts and badges.
6. Louise Martin-Chew. "Brush with Activism" In *Australian*, 28 August 2005.
7. Matt Adams. Blast Theory, Adelaide Thinkers-in-Residence Public Lecture. Adelaide Town Hall, 16 March 2004.
8. John Howard interviewed on 3AW by Neil Mitchell, 22 August 2003. Accessed 5 December 2005. <http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/Interview445.html>
9. *Bell's Theorem* can be read at <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/great/art/bell.html>; for other texts about Bell's work, see <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/great/art/rbell.html>
10. Joseph Pugliese. "To be unAustralian | is it now a badge of honour?" In *Macquarie University News*, Sydney, May 2005.
11. Ibid.
12. Djon Mundine. "White Face/Black Mask". In *Artlink*, Vol. 25, No. 3. Accessed 3 December 2005. <http://www.artlink.com.au/articles.cfm?id=2007>
13. Christine Jackman. "Goward demands 'sorry' for T-shirt". In *Australian*, 22 August 2003.
14. Morgan Thomas. "Who's Dreaming Now?" August 2003. Accessed 8 December 2005. <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/great/art/article2.html>
15. Because Goward and others took Bell's comment literally, and because there were attempts to summarily invert the statement through protests such as 'what if a white man said this about black women', i.e., if the shoe was on the other foot, there was failure to extend the analysis to see the kind of political position and borders of nation/country that Bell was demarcating.
16. Phillip Ruddock interviewed by Tracy Grimshaw, "Today", Channel 9, Brisbane, 7 December 2005. The designated law will state: "A person commits an offence if the person urges another person to overthrow by force or violence: (a) the Constitution; or (b) the Government of the Commonwealth, a state or a territory; or (c) the lawful authority of the Government of the Commonwealth".
17. J.L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*, (ed.) J.O. Urmson (Oxford University Press, 1962, New York), pp. 6-7.
18. Wendy Steiner. *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in An Age of Fundamentalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1995, Chicago), p. 8.
19. Ibid, p. 82.
20. David Hickey. "Simple Hearts: Still Writing Talks". In *Art Issues*, March/April 1991, p. 11.
21. Dubin, op. cit., p. 23.
22. Steiner, op. cit., p. 7.
23. While it's primarily print media that sustains arts rounds and reporters, in the circumstances of Richard Bell and *Escape from Woomera* there was significant electronic media attention, including talkback radio.

There is strong indication that arts coverage, ranging from integration of arts reporting to specialist programming/rounds across the media, is gradually decreasing. This is not because arts reporting has been integrated into other news sections.

24. Steiner, op. cit., p. 5.
25. "Sedition laws won't curb the right to criticise Queen and country". In *Australian*, 8 December 2005. Accessed 8 December 2005.
http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,17494211%255E7582,00.html
26. Samantha Maiden. "Sedition law changes back free speech". In *Australian*, 1 December 2005. Accessed 1 December 2005. <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,10117,17421270-421,00.html>
27. See Freedom for Expression weblog at <http://ozsedition.blogspot.com/>
28. Cited by Thomas Kenneally. "Alert and alarmed: art under fire". In *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November 2005. Accessed 3 December 2005; <http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/alert-and-alarmed-art-under-fire/2005/11/28/1133026405834.html>
29. There have been several incidents of late where political artworks have attracted unwarranted attack, destruction or removal. For example, on 11 November 2005, the ABC reported on an exhibition of portraits by Michael Agzarian at the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. The portraits of politicians with their lips sewn together had attracted a treason complaint that was investigated by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts; accessed 7 December 2005; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200511/s1504405.htm>. Further, *Australian* reported that the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery received phone calls from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, inquiring about whether the Agzarian exhibition was federally funded. "Art gallery 'pressured over painting'", *Australian*, 8 December 2005; accessed 8 December 2005. http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,17499345%255E29277,00.html.

The Khushboo Case File: Reverse Culture Jamming

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Introduction

In September 2005, the Tamil edition of the weekly newsmagazine *India Today* invited popular Tamil film actress and television host Khushboo to write a column in the context of an all-India survey the publication had carried out on 'Changing Sexual Attitudes'. The column was intended as a commentary on the survey's findings. Khushboo had earlier written for the magazine on topics such as the freedom and education of women.

The turn of events after the article was published, and the proportion and vehemence they acquired, surprised everyone. A few days after the magazine hit the stands, an evening publication from the South Indian media giant Sun TV questioned Khushboo's right to speak about 'Tamil women', alleging that the actress had made "derogatory remarks about the chastity of Tamil women" (*Tamil Murasu*, 24 September 2005). Suddenly all hell broke loose. An organisation, ostensibly committed to the protection of Tamil culture, staged massive protests against the "North Indian" Khushboo. Their cadre, including women and members of the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI), staged broomstick-wielding, *chappal* (slipper)-waving demonstrations in Chennai, and defamation charges were filed against Khushboo in courts across Tamil Nadu.

In the six months since the 'Khushboo controversy' hit the headlines, a number of commentaries have attempted to dissect the imbroglio and identify the cultural fault lines along which it was expressed and played out. Apart from the oft-repeated charges of "patriarchy", "political vendetta" and "cultural chasm", the Khushboo 'episode' seems to straddle other dichotomies; Khushboo as a Hindi-speaking, Gujarati Muslim 'outsider' in the

Tamil film industry; Khushboo as a deified figure (there is at least one temple dedicated to her) in contrast to the general portrayal of women in Tamil films; a Dalit party springing to the defence of "Tamil culture"; E.V. Periyar's Self-Respect movement as an emancipator of women, as compared with the role the current Dravidian parties, supposed inheritors of Periyar's legacy, played in fanning the controversy, etc.

The Khushboo controversy lies at the intersection of a number of narratives about culture, myth, notions of female sexuality and identity. At one level, it could be read as a reaction to an attempt to push the boundaries of sexual expression in a conservative patriarchal society. But *l'affaire* Khushboo has also played itself out on multiple overlapping levels.

What Did Khushboo Really Say?

It is important to bear in mind that Khushboo did not actually write the column herself. She narrated her views to Peer Mohamed, an *India Today* journalist, who wrote them down. Therefore, it is possible that the essence of what Khushboo said could have been 'lost in translation'.

According to the text of the column:

Given our conservative Indian backdrop, women are slowly coming out. But I do have questions about this women's liberation when cases like Stefani's accident are happening^a" [this victim was chased and killed by drunken youths after a night party in a Chennai hotel].

And then:

But at the same time, I think sex education is a must in our schools. When the schools fail to teach about sex, parents should educate their children about sex. In my opinion, sex is not only related to body; it's got a lot to do with our minds. I can't understand how some girls could change their boyfriends every Friday. When a girl is sure about her boyfriend she can tell her parents that she's going out with him. When the girl has a serious relationship the parents should also allow it.

Followed by:

Our society should liberate itself from such ideas that brides should all be virgins at the time of marriage. No educated man will expect his bride to be virgin at the time of marriage. But when indulging in pre-marital sex, the girl should guard herself against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Nowhere in the text is there any mention of 'Tamil women' or 'Tamil culture'.¹ To extrapolate a threat to Tamil culture based on a reading of the column is therefore quite a conceptual leap. However, the article also seems to send out contradictory signals. On the

one hand, Khushboo welcomes the fact that women today are more liberal, but she also questions women's liberation; she remarks that educated men should not expect their wives to be virgins, but at the same time she can't understand how girls can change their boyfriends every Friday. In addition, the article seems to suggest that only pre-marital sex causes sexually transmitted diseases.

The difficulty is further compounded by the fact that *karpū*, the Tamil word for chastity, is open to multiple interpretations. *Karpū* can also imply virginity, loyalty, and selflessness. We don't really know in what context Khushboo meant to use the word.

The Advent of Periyar

The Dravidian movement, initiated in Tamil Nadu in 1916 with the release of the "Non-Brahmin Manifesto", first acquired a reformist character that was followed by a radical phase under the leadership of Periyar.

Periyar's construction of Tamil self-identity differed from the orientation later imposed by his followers. He rarely referred to the oft-invoked, supposed innate glory of the Tamils, and their ancient past and unique culture.² Periyar considered it a sheer accident that one was born a Tamil or a Malayali. What mattered more was the unjust practice, depending on the strata into which one was born, of human beings being enslaved in the name of caste and religion. This was unacceptable. Periyar's strong anti-Brahminism and his espousal of 'Tamilness' based on a notion of 'Self-Respect', were posited as a counter to the social order based on caste hierarchy. It is in this context that one should locate Periyar's views, not only on the north-south/Aryan-Dravidian divide, but also his crusades against religious superstition and his critique of Brahminical scriptures.

Periyar responded to Kamban's 11th-century Tamil *Ramayana* with the argument that Rama's war against Lanka signified the Aryan's brutal conquest of the culturally superior Dravidians. He also claimed that the monkeys that Rama encountered in the southern jungles were none other than the Dravidians, and that the epic was an insult to Dravidianism. Furthermore, Periyar also deplored Rama's behaviour towards Sita after she was rescued from Lanka.³ In this instance, Periyar was critical of the casteist and misogynist uses to which the epic had been put under centuries of Brahmin hegemony. He however ignored the fact that in all versions of the *Ramayana*, Rama is portrayed as a Kshatriya (of the warrior caste) and Ravana as a Brahmin.

But the Dravidian-Tamil identity was based partly in opposition to notions of caste oppression and Aryan supremacy, associated with Brahmins in Tamil Nadu. Even as Periyar refused to accord the Tamil language a cultic value, and questioned the claims of Tamil enthusiasts about the trans-historical validity of Tamil classical literature, he articulated Tamilness and anti-Brahminism to mean a certain kind of rationalism. This rationalism was grounded in his vision of a casteless Tamil society.

Periyar's rationalist ideology was particularly radical in that it sought to address the question of gender oppression in a way that has been unparalleled in the Dravidian movement. It was a break from anything that had been articulated till that point, and ever

since. He ridiculed the notion that women had to be 'chaste', and condemned all attempts to portray women as 'fragile' and 'gentle' in the literary texts of the past and the present. He even exhorted women to defend themselves against their unruly husbands by using broomsticks!⁴ The Self-Respect movement organised Self-Respect marriages during the 1930s and '40s, in which all the rituals and symbols of women's enslavement to men, including the *mangalsutra* (necklace signifying the status of married woman), were consciously rejected. The movement strongly advocated divorce, widow remarriage, abortion, equal rights; and argued for women's control over the reproductive process.

The legacy bequeathed by Periyar to the Dravidian movement was used (and abused) by his followers, particularly the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The circumstances under which the DMK was formed, and under which it sought to spread its appeal, led to an alternative interpretation of Periyar's vision. A combination of factors led to a large section of Periyar-led Dravida Kazhagam (DK) members to break away and form the DMK in 1949. One reason for the split was that Periyar refused to participate in electoral politics, preferring to keep the DK as a social movement.

During its early days the DMK did follow Periyar's social reform policies, with their focus on atheism, and non-Brahminism. Demands for an independent sovereign 'Dravida Nadu' were also voiced. The DMK also tried to evolve socialist ideas in this period.

However, once the DMK decided to enter electoral politics, it began to compromise on all these issues. The atheistic slogans were replaced with 'one caste, one god'⁵. In 1971, the DMK openly disassociated itself from Periyar and his followers, who had launched a campaign in Salem to desecrate idols of Rama on the festival of Ramnavami. Likewise, the DMK also gradually gave up its demand for Dravida Nadu. This was because the notion of Dravida Nadu had become anachronistic; and despite its claim of having branches in the other three South Indian states, the DMK's influence was really confined to Tamil Nadu.

In fact, the notion of Dravida Nadu as a political unit that would comprise the four southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, was a fanciful one. If the aim was to achieve Dravida Nadu by uniting the peoples of the four states under the umbrella of a pan-Dravidian identity, then this was bound to fail. Each state has very different linguistic, historical and cultural traditions. The proponents of Dravida Nadu did not take this reality into account.

Periyar and the Gender Question

The Dravidian movement, when led by Periyar, did address the gender question at length. Periyar's views on gender were radical. But even then, the discourse on female liberation was riddled with ambiguities. Thus, despite Periyar, the concept of the ideal Tamil woman as chaste and valorous was inserted into Dravidian discourse.

During the years that the Self-Respect movement was in the ascendant, it conducted many Self-Respect marriages that were free from the rituals and orthodoxy of traditional Hindu weddings. For instance, Self-Respect marriages eschewed the services of a Brahmin priest as well as the chanting of mantras in Sanskrit; moreover, these marriages held that

the bride and groom's mutual decision, and not the consent of the parents, was necessary and central for the marriage.⁶ A Self-Respect marriage required the man and woman to abide by each other's views, needs and concerns.

When it came to *karpu*, Periyar was even more scathing. In his writings in the Tamil journal *Kudi Arasu*, Periyar laid out his argument against *karpu*.⁷ Tracing the etymology of the word, he argued that the term must have originally referred to qualities such as firmness, steadfastness and honesty. Early in human history, *karpu* was probably considered a universal human quality that was believed to inhere in the human body prior to coitus; for after coitus the body becomes marked and comes to bear the trace of another. However, after Aryan Hinduism entered the Tamil country, *karpu* came to denote wifely chastity and was associated with and considered an index of selflessness, pure wifeliness and absolute commitment to a wife's essential duties.

Yet, argued Periyar, this did not mean that the Tamil language and culture were any less culpable with respect to women in this regard, as Tamil poets, time and again, had resorted to the rhetoric of *karpu* in their works. Even Thiruvalluvar, the renowned Tamil moral philosopher of the first century BCE, was not averse to lyricising the quality of *karpu*. Had he not written, "If a chaste woman who worships not god but her husband wills the heavens to rain, it will"?⁸ Given the unequal world of the sexes that we inhabit today, Periyar concluded, women had been coerced and persuaded to accept their bondage, and consent to an idea that stifled their desire and distorted their very being.

Periyar's views on *karpu* represented an implicit critique of masculinity. In an article titled "Masculinity Must Be Destroyed", he observed that the very term "masculinity" degraded women. As long as masculinity persisted as the hegemonic societal norm, women could not expect to be respected. He reasoned that men, whose selves were bound to and constituted by this norm, would continue to believe that courage and freedom inhered solely in the male subject. Further, society as a whole had come to accept this division of qualities into male and female as divinely ordained. Unless the category of masculinity and its obverse, femininity (which implied subservience), were destroyed, there would be no genuine freedom for women.

Periyar considered marriage the ultimate symbol of a woman's enslaved status, for it was marriage that thrust upon her the burden of motherhood.⁹ He often said that marriage, usually considered necessary for the propagation of the human species and for a good life, was in reality a deception practiced on women, a conspiracy hatched very early in history to keep women submissive. Of whichever caste or class she was, the bond of marriage invariably rendered a woman the property and slave of her husband. Periyar characterised the entire existent ritual of marriage as an Aryan-Brahmin imposition on the Dravidian south. Periyar saw Self-Respect marriages as a solution to liberation from Brahminical patriarchy. Moreover, since Self-Respect marriages were voluntary associations, Periyar insisted that they implicitly endorsed divorce.¹⁰

The chief virtue of Self-Respect marriages lay in the fact that they defined women as autonomous persons rather than as wives or potential mothers.¹¹ Moreover, such

marriages framed women as equal subjects, with equal rights to property and power within the household and outside of it. Periyar advocated birth control as an effective strategy to help women relieve themselves of the fear and responsibility of imposed motherhood. He pointed out that birth control afforded physically weak women a means out of the trauma of pregnancy.

The Aftermath of the DMK

The political life and culture in Tamil Nadu, according to some commentators,¹² are significantly marked by the ideology and practice of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). The DMK's hegemonic grip owes much to its rhetoric to 'Tamilness', which was constructed in part by notions of *maanam* (honour) and valour. The concept of female chastity was posited and articulated within the confines of these notions, and reinforced by the media forms of popular culture ; so much so that issues politically relevant to the Tamil people cannot be posed outside this hegemonic framework.

The transformation of Dravidian politics under the DMK was nowhere felt as keenly as in the cultural realm; it was here that Periyar's ideology was distorted to serve populist interests. Periyar had articulated the concept of self-respect in order to define Dravidian/Tamil consciousness as a foil to Aryan/Brahmin dominance. This consciousness was accompanied by reform in specific practices such as widow remarriage, self-respect marriages, and anti-superstition campaigns. However, the DMK sought to project self-respect in a radically different way.¹³ They attempted to render this concept as essentially 'Tamil' in its origin, and constructed elaborate critiques of Aryan supremacy to this end. They aimed to demonstrate that the Dravidian past was inherently superior to the Aryan past, endowed as the former was with an inviolable sense of 'honour'. In other words, the medieval concept of *maanam* was substituted for the secular notion of 'self-respect'.

DMK leader C.N. Annadurai, for instance, claimed in his 1948 book *Arya Mayai* (Aryan Deception) that the Aryans had never set foot south of the Vindhya mountains.¹⁴ He also claimed that Tamil society before and after the Sangam age was secular in character, and that the only religions known to the Tamils were Buddhism and Jainism. However, the 'Golden Age' of the Tamils that Annadurai celebrated was not particularly egalitarian in the modern sense of the term. *Puranaanooru*, the Sangam text upon which Annadurai relied for his historical argument, indicates the existence of the four *varnas* (castes), the presence of Brahmins, and several forms of rituals and worship in Tamil Nadu.

DMK ideologues sought to project *maanam* as the sole defining principle of Tamilness, and embedded this concept within a complex genealogy of texts. This textual space was constituted out of three narratives: *Silappathikaram*, *Puranaanooru* and *Thirukkural*, which were repeatedly invoked to provide legitimacy to the pronouncements of the DMK.¹⁵

Silappathikaram, written in the 2nd century AD by Ilango Adigal, is a text that celebrates the powers of a chaste Tamil woman called Kannagi. Her husband Kovalan, an affluent merchant in the Chola kingdom, falls in love with a dancer called Madhavi and showers his wealth on her. A misunderstanding causes him to leave Madhavi and return to Kannagi. The

couple then sets out for Madurai (in the Pandya kingdom) where Kovalan hopes to sell Kannagi's anklet and raise money for a livelihood. A goldsmith who offers to buy the anklet finds that it resembles the one he stole from the Pandya queen, and accuses Kovalan of theft. On hearing the false testimony, the Pandya king orders Kovalan's execution. Kannagi rushes to the king's court and proves Kovalan's innocence. Shocked by his own injustice, the Pandya king dies. Kannagi rips off her left breast and hurls it at the city of Madurai, which goes up in flames because of the power of her chastity. Kannagi then ascends to heaven. Later, upon hearing that the northern kings Kanaga and Vijaya had insulted Kannagi, Tamil culture and language, the Chera king Chenkuttuvan leads a military expedition to the north, humbles the offenders and forces them to carry stones from the Himalayas to the Chera country. These stones were later sculpted into an image of Kannagi.

DMK leader M. Karunanidhi, formerly a scriptwriter for the Tamil film industry, has repeatedly evoked the Kannagi story in his political speeches and writings. He also wrote a play and a film script based on the epic. However, in his version the characters of Kovalan and Madhavi have been reinterpreted. Kovalan now becomes a defender of Tamil culture and womanhood rather than one who moved away from his chaste wife. Madhavi represents Tamil culture, and Kovalan is portrayed as Madhavi's saviour, otherwise she would have succumbed to the predation of an old Greek merchant. Kovalan emerges in Karunanidhi's narrative as an ideal Tamil hero whose chaste wife waits and hopes for his return. Not only is Kovalan deemed worthy of his wife's chastity, but is also accorded a 'chivalric' image. As a man of true Tamil honour, he courts the 'other' woman in order to save her from a repugnant destiny.

The Kovalan-Kannagi-Madhavi story has since become an archetype that offers an ideal resolution to the complex claims of marriage and sexuality. It is through this set of relationships that a man's honour is mediated. The man's honour depends on his safeguarding one woman's chastity and recognising another's devotion. The honour of a woman depends primarily on the legitimacy her virtue acquires as a consequence of her relationship with a man. The Tamil's *maanam* thus lies in the defence of a woman's purity. A woman's sexual purity in turn embodies an ideal Tamil society. Karunanidhi's rereading of the epic abounds in metaphors of sexual purity, sexual corruption and virgin innocence.

As a narrative, *Silappathikaram* served to bridge the present with the distant, mythical past. In Karunanidhi's version, there is a scene where Chenkuttuvan exhorts his courtiers to accompany him on the northern expedition to avenge the insults to Tamil culture and honour by the Aryan rulers. The Chera king appeals to the Tamil's innate sense of honour, and is willing to bury political differences with his Chola and Pandya rivals in order to forge a pan-Tamil unity. The courtiers with these particular names ; Aasaithambi, Chitrarasu, Nedunchezian, Arignar, Kalaiggar, Kavignar, and Kalaivanar ; were also names of DMK functionaries. Aasaithambi is not just the name of Ilango, the poet-author of *Silappathikaram*, but also the name of a leading DMK figure at that time. The name of the Pandyan king, Nedunchezian, was also the name of one of the founders of the DMK. Arignar, Kalaiggar,

Kavignar, and Kalaivaanar are generic Tamil names that refer to poets, scholars and artists, as well as the honorific titles of C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, Kannadassan (a well known lyricist and script writer, and a strong DMK supporter) and N.S. Krishnan (a stage and screen comedian and patron of the DMK), respectively.¹⁶ This allegorical transposition, eliding past and present, legitimised DMK leaders as true patrons and defenders of Tamil culture.

The Portrayal of Women in MGR's Films

The ethos of popular cinema has had a close, almost incestuous relationship, with the political culture in Tamil Nadu. The DMK also used cinema as a tool for the propagation of its ideology. Many leaders of the Dravidian movement were also involved in Tamil cinema in some capacity. C.N. Annadurai and Karunanidhi both wrote scripts for films, and several film personalities were actively involved in DMK politics. Of these, M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), who later became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, was the most prominent.

Cinema enabled a wider dissemination of DMK ideology. The practices of DMK theatre were infused into cinema; thus, for instance, the exuberant use of language, rhetorical flourishes and hyperbolic speeches were a hallmark of early DMK cinema. In the 1952 classic *Paraasakthi*, the hero Gunasekharan (played by the path-breaking Tamil film hero Sivaji Ganesan, then a DMK activist, in his first major role) speaks passionately to the camera in a courtroom scene, demanding justice for himself and his sister who have been wronged.¹⁷ Cinema also helped the DMK to articulate its political and cultural ideology through an array of signs and symbols. The party ideology was propagated through gestures, song-and-dance sequences and ritual invocations of party symbols. Several MGR movies reflect this. For instance, in *Kalankarai Vilakkam* (1965), MGR is shown watching a song-and-dance sequence called "*Sange Muzhangu* (Blow Ye, Conches)", a rousing invocation to Tamilness. Less subtle signs are found in several films scripted by DMK ideologues: a photograph of C.N. Annadurai on the walls of a poor man's hut; the DMK flag fluttering in a slum; the hero dressed in party colours; songs replete with anagrammatic devices that stand for names of leaders of the DMK.¹⁸

It is therefore not surprising that MGR, who for years had been an icon for the Dravidian movement, came to be subconsciously associated with all the ideologies connected with that movement in popular imagination. From 1953 to 1972, when he was a member of the DMK, MGR's films propagated a diluted but clearly identifiable strand of the DMK ideology. Given the DMK's overt allegiance to cinema as a vehicle for political communication,¹⁹ it consciously transferred MGR's cinematic popularity to the domain of party politics. But once MGR was forced to leave the DMK in 1972 for alleging corruption against his party colleagues in public, and formed his own organisation, Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [which was renamed All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) during the Emergency], all the support from the cinema hall 'front-benchers' went with him.

The explicit interaction between cinema and politics, a unique feature of Tamil politics, has been studied by a number of scholars.²⁰ They have argued that MGR's popular appeal rested on his screen roles as a subaltern hero combating everyday oppression. He

appeared on screen as a peasant, fisherman, rickshaw puller, gardener, shoeshine boy, cowherd and multiple other incarnations. In these roles, he usurps the exclusive privileges of his social superiors; the right to dispense justice, access to literacy and to women, right to adopt the language and posture of authority. But instead of developing a subversive critique of the iniquitous system that is portrayed, these films offer a resolution for the injustice that is derived from within the framework of the system itself. Most of MGR's roles in his movies portray him as a swashbuckling hero; a screen image that is located in the 'public domain' or 'non-domestic space', historically and culturally constituted as men's exclusive preserve. Given this, one would assume that the 'MGR phenomenon' would attract more male than female audiences. However, a major constituency from which MGR derived support was that of women.²¹

The scholar M.S.S. Pandian argues that the support from women is derived from the access that these films provide to certain "moments of freedom" with which the women spectators can identify; moments normally denied to them in their everyday lives. First, in these films marriage ceases to be a site of parental authority mediated by caste or class. The heroine marries a man of her own choice, not of her parents'. The deserving hero, none other than MGR, thus dissolves the impending caste and class and parental structures of power. The limits of desire and emotional involvement are thus seemingly 'subverted'. In *Rajakumari* (1947), MGR as a humble villager wins the hand of a princess in marriage. In *Mattukara Velan* (1970), MGR marries the daughter of an affluent lawyer who had earlier thrown him out of the house for being a lowly cowherd. *Thaiku Thalai Magan* (1967) finds MGR marrying the only daughter of the local landlord. This pattern repeats itself in film after film, such as *Baghdad Thirudan* (1960), *Panathottam* (1963), *Yenga Veetu Pillai* (1965) and *Kumarikottam* (1967). In *Padakotti* (1964), MGR plays a fisherman who fights with a powerful fish trader for the hand of the village headman's beautiful daughter.

In rural Tamil Nadu, where upper-caste landlords treat concubines as status symbols, and access to and control over women is a sign of authority, women of the subaltern classes are invariably the victims of the sexual politics of caste and class. In this scenario, MGR's films present a strong inversion of reality.²² Equally important is the fact that when MGR appears in elite roles, he renounces his superior status in the marital context. In *Yenga Veetu Pillai* (1965), *Idaya Kani* (1975), *Naan Aanaiyittil* (1966), *Aasai Mugam* (1965), *Pallaandu Vaazhga* (1975) and *Netru Indhru Naalai* (1974), he renounces his position as a wealthy man and marries a working-class woman. He also renounces his upper-caste status.

Second, villains in MGR's films are lecherous, rapacious, and sadistic; they often employ force to oppress and overpower the women who try to resist them. But in characters played by MGR, one finds strong elements of the opposite tendency. He is an exceptional man who does not indulge in sexual violence. In *Oli Vilakku* (1968), a young widow leaves her home to escape ill-treatment at the hands of her in-laws, and lives with a thief, played by MGR. Throughout the film the widow is presented as sexually available: she admires with vanity her own image in the mirror, she accepts gifts and wears low-cut blouses and tight *saris*. Her own brother-in-law as well as the villain of the film attempt to rape her; however, she is saved by MGR. When she moves in with the hero, neighbours

suspect her of having loose morals and accuse her: "You have lost your *tali* (necklace signifying the status of being married) but not your desire"²³. In a world of sexual aggressors, MGR plays the role of protector. He distances himself physically by sleeping in the porch of his own home, and even in an inebriated state does not molest her. In Tamil society, where violence against women and sex is an intrinsic part of daily life,²⁴ the sympathetic masculine figures portrayed by MGR offer a much-needed counterpoint.

Third, the repressed sexuality of women in Tamil society finds expression in MGR films. It is culturally prescribed that women should earn their reputation as moral beings through controlling their physical desires. MGR films present an potent alternative: in their plots, it is the young and beautiful heroine who takes the initiative, persistently daydreams about the hero and pursues him, behaviour that would be regarded as brazen in real life. The heroine summons up extra-*risqué* dreams in the form of song-and-dance sequences. While the dances are choreographed to signify the sexual act, the lyrics are replete with metaphorical double entendre. The repressed sexuality of Tamil women finds its momentary and unreal catharsis in the course of witnessing these highly eroticised sequences. In a society where female voyeurism is censored as culturally unacceptable, the darkened atmosphere of the cinema hall is perhaps one of the few public spaces where women are able to practice it.

However, these moments of supposed freedom are ephemeral; they do not, in the final analysis, enable even an open-ended critique of the male dominance in Tamil society that is mirrored in Tamil films. Rather, the *dénouement* of these films inevitably reaffirms patriarchal values.²⁵ In addition, monogamy, chastity, and all the other symbols of male domination in conventional sexual relationships are carefully elaborated and defended as the embodiment of the highest womanly virtues.

Female sexuality is a social construct. An independent woman, one who is not under male control, is seen as sexually threatening and subversive. Male anxiety over female sexuality is heightened when the woman in question transgresses socially prescribed norms, be they related to dress, space, or in the case of Khushboo's comments, the conventional understandings of sexual behaviour. Men are supposed to establish their honour/virility by taming such nonconformist, autonomous women into docile wives ever-willing to perform the submissive gesture of touching their husband's feet.²⁶

In *Kanavan* (1968), not only is the heroine portrayed as a 'feminist', but the plot of the film was provided by MGR. The film revolves around Rani, the spoilt daughter of a rich man who declares that her aim is to "punish these headstrong men and live independently". She wears Western clothes, and insults and turns down suitors offering marriage. Her worried father writes a will stipulating that unless his daughter gets married within a month, she will not inherit any of his property. In order to obtain the property and retain her independence, she marries a prisoner who is condemned to death. The prisoner (played by MGR) has been convicted on false charges. Rani waits for the day the hero will be hanged, but the arrival of fresh evidence leads to his acquittal. The hero tells his wife, "How could there be a person like you in Tamil Nadu, where women treat it as a boon to die when their husbands are alive?" Without the hero's protection, a number of unscrupulous people try and take advantage of

the heroine. She realises at last that only her husband can protect her. She bids farewell to feminism; clad in a *sari*, she returns to the hero and says. "I am fit only to be at your feet".

This theme repeats itself in films such as *Kumari Kottam* (1971) and *Vivasayee* (1967). In the latter, the heroine's tight T-shirt incites a peasant to molest her. Pardoning the peasant, claiming it was not his fault but that of the woman's provocative garment, the hero covers the heroine's already-draped bosom with a towel as if it were the *pallu* of a *sari*. The woman thus doubly subordinated is invariably upper-caste/class, speaks English and is urbanised, while the hero is a rustic. This urban-rural divide serves to show the countryside as a repository of desirable cultural values.

In MGR's films, as in society, the woman's identity is dependent on that of her husband. And it is her married status, symbolised by the *tali*, which invests her with a wider social respectability. Its 'other' ; widowhood ; is a dreaded fate. The *tali* is treated as a marker for sexual purity, in the sense of a sexual belonging to the husband. The groom ties the *tali* around his bride's neck during the marriage ceremony, the ornament signifying his possession of the woman. The power of the *tali* is immense. In cultural understanding, even divine power retreats when confronted with the strength of the *tali*, manifested in a virtuous wife's commitment to fidelity and chastity. This raw power, symbolising latent female sexuality, is sought to be controlled and kept in check.

Khushboo Redux

When the Tamil Protection Movement, comprising the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) and Muventhar Munnetra Kazhagam (MMK), took to the streets to protest Khushboo's remarks, observers noted, with some irony, the fact of a Dalit group choosing to become a protector of 'Tamil culture'. The general assumption is that a Dalit party, representing the subaltern classes, would not be enthusiastic supporters of constructions about 'Tamilness' that rely in part on specific notions of caste. DPI leader Thol Thirumavalavan characterised Khushboo an "immoral woman" and assailed her for "lowering the dignity of Tamil women"²⁷. It has been suggested that if Thirumavalavan wanted to break out of the confining straitjacket of the narrow caste identity that his party has been associated with, and reach out to a wider section of the public, he would have to dilute some of his radicalism. Similarly, Dr. S. Ramadoss, leader of the PMK, a party that stood for Vanniyar (lower-caste) interests, might also be trying to reach out to other sections, hence the need to assume a pan-Tamil identity and embrace issues that concern 'Tamilness' or Tamil culture. This is exactly what happened when the DMK split from the DK to pursue electoral politics. The DMK was compelled to substantially tone down DK radicalism to gain wider acceptance.

Gender roles and sexual mores in Tamil society have been specifically constructed to represent women as cultural 'carriers': family honour, community honour and cultural honour are intimately bound with the honour and chastity of women. If a woman is humiliated, the whole community experiences humiliation. The three institutions of family, community, and culture lie in concentric planes of interaction: family is at the centre; community encircles it,

and in turn produces the reified notion of traditional culture. It can also be seen as an inverted pyramid: the family unit at the bottom, providing a foundation, that expands out to community and culture. Any change in one of these institutions, in either direction, tends to affect the entire pyramid. Changes that radiate from the lowest tier, i.e., the family, are especially dangerous since they have the power to destabilise the entire pyramid.

In order to keep this social pyramid firm (or in other words, to uphold the *maanam* of family, community and culture), it is anchored firmly to the entity of the woman, shackling her in a finite, inflexible space with minimal options for negotiation or movement.

What Khushboo actually said, combined with what people thought she said, was interpreted as a challenge to the carefully constructed, historical notions of 'Tamilness' as an ethnic characteristic and mode of being. These were created by weaving together many disparate local strands into an archetypal grand narrative about 'Tamilness'. Political mobilisation was successfully attempted on the basis of this coalition of cultural discourses.

It's a familiar tale of a gendered perspective culturally/politically appropriated and used to pursue a specific end. Khushboo (probably without realising she was doing so) is an instance of a public figure trying to claim greater space for uncensored choice and individual expression by women. We cannot know whether her comments, and the media-enabled cultural/political turbulence that followed, actually brought about any enduring or authentic change in claustrophobic conventional thinking about the social/sexual roles of Tamil women. However, we do know that in February 2006, the Madras High Court ordered a permanent stay on the trial in all six cases filed against Khushboo in various district courts in Tamil Nadu.

NOTES

1. <http://logtk.blogspot.com/2005/11/spectacle-of-bigotry-pre-martial-sex.html>
2. S.V. Rajadurai and V. Geetha. "DMK Hegemony: The Cultural Limits to Political Consensus". In (ed.) T.V. Satyamurthy, *Social Change and Political Discourse in India* (Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 557.
3. *Ibid*, p. 558.
4. *Ibid*.
5. *Ibid*, p. 560.
6. S.V. Rajadurai and V. Geetha. *Towards A Non-Brahmin Millenium* (Samya, 1998, Kolkata), p. 381.
7. *Ibid*, p. 386.
8. *Ibid*, p. 387.
9. *Ibid*, p. 402.
10. *Kudi Arasu*, 29.12.29. Cited in C.V. Rajadurai and V. Geetha, op. cit., p. 403.
11. *Ibid*, p. 404.
12. S.V. Rajadurai and V. Geetha (1996). Cited in (ed.) T.V. Satyamurthy, op. cit., p. 550.
13. *Ibid*, p. 561.
14. *Ibid*.
15. *Ibid*, p. 565.
16. *Ibid*, p. 566.

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18. Ibid.
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26. S. Anandhi. "Sex and Sensibility in Tamil Politics". In *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 November 2005.

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Seeking Chaos: The Birth and Intentions of Queer Politics

GAUTAM BHAN

Apparently, our lives should not be chaotic. If they are, it is never by our own design, and usually despite our best efforts. The immediate need of the hour then becomes the resolution of this chaos: the imposition ; and I use the word pointedly ; of some kind of order, no matter how much or how little this order may capture of the constantly changing realities of our lives. We don't need to look far for examples of order that are, at best, blurry facsimiles of our original states of being ; just think of the perpendicularly intersecting borders of African nations, carved out so neatly on paper without thought to whether people, as opposed to maps, can be brought into order out of chaos simply through the enforcing of impenetrable lines that keep them from one another by assigning different names, identities, and draping them in different flags.

When it comes to sexuality, order begins with acts of naming and the creation of sexual identities based on presumed sexual behaviour. People become gay *or* straight *or* bisexual *or* lesbian *or* *hijra*. Descriptions that pose as definitions, initiating an endless cycle where no one can remember if the identity came before the practice, or vice versa. The presence of identity labels ; gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, *hijra* ; give an appearance of calm to our sexual universes, and a sense of peace to those who fear sexual chaos as perhaps the worst kind of turbulence there is.

But at what cost does this calm emerge? And is it merely coincidence that after these labels, each of us that are made to belong to one or the other identity seem to increasingly look, talk, behave, and resemble our fellow prisoners? What conversations are possible when language constantly returns us to the markers of identities, and what spaces of

imagination are we unable to see because they lie slightly beyond the limits of what our society's sexual order tells us we are supposed to want?

What would happen if we refused this neat appearance of order? Would sexual chaos result? What would it look like? Where would it live and how would it make its presence felt? Perhaps more importantly, what does our fear of this chaos tell us about how true our current identity-based ordering of the sexual universe really is?

To find the beginnings of answers, I use the story of an intentionally and organically created turbulence: the different notions of what it means to be queer. A newly emerging language within the LGBT (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered) circles, the discourse of queer politics challenges distinct and ordered understandings of sex, sexuality, and sexual identity without necessarily offering replacement categories. It does not, in other words, simply seek to play musical labels with one or the other set of distinct sexual identities, but actually seeks to challenge the idea of such neatly sorted identities in the first place.

I tell the story of 'queerness' through the creation of Voices against Section 377, a Delhi-based coalition of different rights-based groups that have come together to challenge India's archaic sodomy law. The arguments I make in favour of a certain kind of sexual disorder ; chaos, if you will ; are, ironically, fairly simple. First, that the ordering principle of identities relies upon rendering invisible the multiple affiliations that each human being has within their lives along demographics other than sexual preference. Second, that the notions of sexual identity often privilege the act of physical sex over more complex and subtle notions of sexual attraction and intimacy that could result, if not so brutally hammered into recognisable constraints, into different kinds of relationships between human beings, which, in turn, could cause a wonderful chaos where people don't enter into pre-determined institutions that invoke the mantle of tradition to perpetuate inequity.

Why Turn to Queer Politics?

PRISM ; or People for the Rights of Indian Sexuality Minorities ; is a Delhi-based political advocacy group known to be one of the most active forums for the rights of LGBT communities in India.

In July 2002, PRISM decided to no longer expand its acronym and remain simply as Prism. It argued: "thinking of LGBT people as minorities only reinforces a mentality in which gay people become a small, disconnected population 'over there', distinct from normal, heterosexual people. At best, we are different and make different 'choices' to lead different 'lifestyles'; at worst, we are deviants. But we are always the 'other', living on our own rainbow planet judged against the normalcy of heterosexual union. We wanted to break this distance, and not look at sexuality through a minority-majority or an us/them framework^{f1}.

In 2003, the first LGBT students group in the history of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi decided that it too would prefer to function as a "queer" students collective, rather than an LGBT space. Most recently, in July 2004 a coalition of groups and individuals came together to form Voices Against Section 377, a self-described queer political forum committed to

"ending discrimination under Section 377", and emphasising the "the links between different axes of power, thereby showing the interconnectedness of homophobia, sexism, racism, and class- and caste-based discrimination"². The unique thing about Voices is that of the dozen or so organisations that are part of the coalition, only a few explicitly identify as being LGBT, the rest being groups that work on issues concerning women, children, health and human rights. Put simply, it is the first time that non-LGBT-identified people have taken on a sustained campaign for queer rights as their own issue.

Indian society repeatedly tells us that there should be only one kind of acceptable desire ; male, heterosexual, and within marriage. Social structures further define and defend what I will call the heteronormative ideal: rigid notions of what it means to be a man or a woman, how the two should relate, and the family unit that should result from such a relationship. Manly men, therefore, must marry feminine women, and have children who bear the caste, class, religion, and property of their father. Heteronormativity and its attendant social privileges represent an ideal kind of social order: it invokes tradition, and is hence internalised and self-imposed as well as directly and openly imposed; it appears all-pervasive since it only recognises unions and social formations that fall within its belief systems, and brands others as 'abnormal'; it is pervasive enough to prevent those that oppose it from locating any fissure through which to insert any criticism.

How do you attack a belief system that is, truly, everywhere? The critical Foucauldian dilemma arises yet again: can you actually change an oppressive system while you're inside it? Queer politics attempts to do precisely this; and, metaphorically, to do it by causing chaos in a system of heteronormativity that needs and demands an unquestioned and hierarchical order of desire in order to survive.

For LGBT activists in India in the late 1990s, the only means to garner attention or support was to speak of queer persons as the victims of human rights violations, and/or of HIV/AIDS. The bodies of LGBT people and their desires were pushed to the periphery, and an acceptable dialogue of rights, violence and disease prevention took its place. This left unchallenged the heteronormative structures that legitimised social conceptions of queer relationships as obscene, sinful, taboo and illegitimate; and of queer people as, at best, the concern of a small minority; or at worst, deviant, abnormal, perverted and/or mentally ill. In other words, one didn't fight for the right of LGBT people to live lives of respect and dignity; one simply fought for their right to not be subject to public and extreme abuse and violence, and to not die of HIV/AIDS.

Even when sexuality was articulated as a politics ; largely using the rhetoric of human rights to speak of "gay rights" ; it was given little legitimacy. In India, alliances with progressive movements were all the more precious for the few activists who could afford to lead openly queer lives and organise around issues of sexuality. Sexuality, however, is placed at the bottom of a hierarchy of oppressions, in the manner that gender once used to be placed. It is considered a lesser politics, one less important than those of poverty, caste, religion, and labour. This fact was made abundantly clear as queer activists sat at a planning meeting for the World Social Forum that was held in Mumbai in 2004, trying to get gender

and sexuality included in the thematic foci of the forum ; only to be told by one of India's most respected trade union leaders that the WSF was a space to "discuss serious issues of development and society, not to traverse through its dark alleyways and shadowy corners".

In the few allied spaces we activists found (for instance, some autonomous women's groups), some of us began to change the language of political assertion. In a July 2003 *parcha* (protest letter), Prism argued that an ethos of "intersectionality ; the linkages between axes of power and oppression, or the interconnectedness of homophobia, sexism, racism, and class and caste-based discrimination" was at the heart of their work. At a meeting of nearly all the major autonomous women's NGOs in Delhi a few months later, activists realised the necessity of this approach. In the first half of 2003, seven cases of double suicides involving young women had been reported in the state of Kerala. The women, most in their mid-20s, left suicide notes stating that they were ending their lives because they were being forced into arranged marriages, and could not bear to be parted from one another. In the autonomous women's groups meeting earlier mentioned, a Prism member raised the issue of lesbian suicides as something women's groups should take on. However, though most of the groups were supportive, they felt that the issue was one that Prism ; being an LGBT organisation ; should raise, and other groups should support. As a Prism member later noted:

Just as only Dalits talk about caste, and only women talk about gender, apparently only homosexuals were supposed to talk about sexuality. As such, it was possible for women's groups to support "our cause" rather than see how queer experiences are trying to challenge the same heteronormative paradigms as the women's movement! Lesbian suicides became about a certain type of woman rather than about the workings of heterosexual and patriarchal control over all women's bodies, as though lesbians in Kerala were unaffected by the workings of class, caste, religion, gender, and other frameworks of difference.³

As LGBT activists found themselves increasingly the only voices willing to speak about sexuality ; homosexual or heterosexual! - and, on a very pragmatic level, as they realised the need for true alliances if the queer movement was ever going to be able to reach mainstream and larger audiences, the need for a change in the language and strategy of LGBT organising became increasingly apparent. This shift was needed precisely in order to realise that the language and order of the system only permitted sexuality and gender to emerge and be discussed in certain ways, at certain places, and within certain boundaries. Queer activists understood that unless they used a new language, one that worked as an assertion against dominant twin orders ; of heteronormativity in mainstream society, and of minority/majority-centred hierarchies of grief and politics in progressive spaces ; queer political activity would always remain marginal. It was within this context that Voices Against Section 377 emerged.

The Birth of Voices

Voices Against Section 377 consists of human rights groups, LGBT groups, women's groups, child rights groups and health groups, uniting to fight a homophobic law. What brings such diverse groups together, and why at this time point of time?

Prism was moving towards an idea of intersectionality ; speaking of sexuality in conjunction with more familiar, wider progressive politics, and moving away from strictly violations-based activism. This realignment increasingly became part of what Prism members began to call a "queer" perspective. Consciously moving away from speaking of LGBT concerns as LGBT-identified people, Prism turned the dialogue to gender and sexuality, and argued, that, from a queer perspective, issues of race/caste/class/gender could not be addressed without examining and addressing issues of sexuality, and vice versa. In effect, queer movements demanded inclusion in other progressive movements by articulating LGBT issues in intersection with other politics. The frame was not about homosexual versus heterosexual, but about how normative understandings of race, caste, class, gender and patriarchy create predictable categories of 'normal' and 'abnormal'; and then penalise those who transgress these bounds. These may include the mapping of sexuality on the bodies of minority Muslim and Dalit women, inter-caste couples, or *hijras*, whose anatomies and subjectivities are publicly ridiculed and castigated in a culture that claims to respect sexuality as a private matter.

This changing articulation has had two effects. First, it has given non-LGBT identified activists a language in which to articulate issues of sexuality not within an "us-versus-them" framework, but as an issue they also claim as their own and simultaneously articulate within their own movements. In the first meeting of the newly-formed coalition Voices Against Section 377, all members were asked to sit together and answer the question "What is sexuality?" The aim of the exercise was to make all present name and think about their own sexuality. Paraphrasing Foucault, it could be said that the aim of the exercise was to keep Voices members from obsessively speaking of their LGBT experiences, a reflex that tended to reify the 'normalcy' of heterosexual behaviour. In a queer framework, gender and sexuality are not confined to the labels of 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual'. The regular order of socially assigned identity is broken. In the free space that results, new voices and new subjectivities become possible. The immediate consequence of this newfound freedom is that non-LGBT identified people can, for the first time, legitimately speak of LGBT rights from positions of authenticity. As the scholar Nivedita Menon has eloquently argued:

...even at its best, society's response to the question of sexuality has been in the form of 'respecting choice'. Such a response, as we have seen, leaves unquestioned heterosexuality as the norm ; that is, 'most of us are heterosexual, but there are others out there who are *either* lesbian *or* gay *or* B (bisexual), T (transgendered), *or* K' (*kothi*). The alphabets proliferate endlessly *outside* the unchallenged heterosexual space. But if we recognise that this 'normal' heterosexuality is painfully constructed and kept in place by a range of cultural, biomedical and economic controls, precisely in order to sustain existing hierarchies of class and caste and gender, then we would have to accept that all of us are ; or have the potential to be ; 'queer'.⁴

Along with new voices, there are new locations. The second effect of a queer articulation is that it has a multiplier effect within other progressive circles. The members of Voices come from different fields of work, and they take issues of same-sex desire back

into movements on health, women's rights, child rights and human rights. Since its inception, Voices has conducted consultative workshops with the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan ; the largest network of health NGOs in India ; on the intersections of sexuality and access to health; with the Network of Autonomous Women's Groups on sexuality and women's movements; with the Psychological Foundation of India on understandings of sexuality within mental health practice, along with public rallies, and outreach efforts in different parts of the city, including at Delhi University. In progressive spaces, queer issues are raised from organisations seen not just as LGBT organisations, but also as existing members of these networks. In its mode of outreach, Voices presents a forum that cannot be dismissed easily.

This chaos does not come without pressures to return a substitute order, or even the old one. When non-LGBT-identified activists represent Voices at various events, gay activists have been known to question these representatives' right to be speak for LGBT communities while being "technically heterosexual". Amongst heterosexually identified people, there is a great deal of hesitancy in being associated with queer politics except in the traditional capacity of distant but supportive allies; to show that there is a genuine need to share politics, but also a need to publicly show that they are not "like us".

Is "queer" an identity, a politics, a community, or a philosophy? Is it limited to same-sex desire, or can anyone embrace it? Do I want people who do not profess same-sex desire to be able to identify as being queer ; what does that give me, and what does that take away? Is "queer" a kind of impulse ; a liberatory moment that lets us see and articulate our politics in a new and subversive way, rather than a parallel system of political thought? The chaotic discussions and speculations around who can be queer and who cannot, whether we are all queer or none of us are, whether queer is an identity or a political perspective or a cult or a knitting group, have in the end served the purpose: they have enabled the emergence of queer politics. They have disrupted essentialist notions of identity within LGBT spaces and within mainstream society. They have reminded us that the calm of neat identity categories conceals as much as it reveals, and they have made new links, created new voices, and opened new spaces for dissent. They have, in other words, created a wonderful turbulence that has brought dynamism and engagement back into queer spaces. What greater success can any political language have?

NOTES

1. PRISM *parcha*, July 2002. On file; copy available upon request.
2. Voices Against Section 377, minutes of meeting, July 2004. On file with author; copy available upon request.
3. Personal communication. Name withheld on request.
4. Nivedita Menon. "How Natural is Normal?" In (eds.) Bhan, G. and A. Narrain, *Because I Have A Voice: Queer Politics in India* (Yoda Press, 2005, New Delhi).

Family / Families

ASHIM PURKAYASTHA

These formal group portraits are all of families of Bengali-speaking migrants in Assam, a state in North-eastern India. Assam, like the rest of the Northeast, has had a turbulent recent history, witnessing both State terror and violent insurgency, inter-ethnic violence, and repeated attempts at selective ethnic cleansing directed against non-Axomiya migrants, especially those from Bangladesh. Each of the families portrayed in these photographs is caught in the pincer movement between the Indian state and Axomiya insurgent groups, and has had someone go missing. These pictures are a way of remembering those who disappeared, and a testament to a time of perennial anxiety, stockpiling of crude weapons at home, and the constant wait for the wail of a curfew siren.









Liberal Nightmares: A Manual of Northeastern Dreams

TARUN BHARTIYA



*I was having a dream, a very pleasant one,
it began almost like a nightmare.¹*

; Yumlembam Ibomcha

First the Nightmare...

In the accidental cartography of India, its North and Northeast have always remained unpacified ; regions of anger and danger. Through their valiant struggles for autonomy and self-determination, they have reminded Indians and the world of the provisional status of all atlases. This defiant refusal to be the 'diversity' of 'unity in diversity' has always struck Indians as slightly pretentious, and they have responded with various pacification campaigns ; military, legal, cultural, developmental. From the time of Independence, India has obsessively tried to win its Northeast, worrying about the map of this area getting severed from its slender chicken neck. This cartographic mania has meant that all other aspects of democratic politics have remained just inspiring footnotes to the glorious saga of a possessive nationalism dragging its mapmakers' chains around its *phareng*-ordained²

territories. If the *phareng* gave a territory, they also handed down laws like the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act (henceforth, AFSPA),³ to administer those territories. The Indian military commander, who had interpreted the wishes of British masters for their colonial subjects, post-India's tryst with destiny quietly undertook similar interpretation for the same subjects, who were now called citizens.

If the AFSPA is the window through which India gazes proudly at its Northeast, the region also has the 'look east' policy of the Orwellian Ministry of DONER, or Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, which shall open the doors of development through which the region can walk into the modern world: a duopoly of gun and gold. Which basically means that for Thangjam Ibopishak, the poet of Imphal surreal, the patriotic authenticity of the bullet is more important than the death it will bring.

I Want to Be Killed by an Indian Bullet⁴

I heard the news long ago that they were looking for me; in the morning in the afternoon at night. My children told me; my wife told me.

One morning they entered my drawing room, the five of them. Fire, water, air, earth, sky, are the names of these five. They can create men; also destroy men at whim. They do whatever they fancy. The very avatar of might.

I ask them: "When will you kill me?"

The leader replied: "Now. We'll kill you right now. Today is very auspicious. Say your prayers. Have you bathed? Have you had your meal?"

"Why will you kill me? What is my crime? What evil deed have I done?" I asked them again.

"Are you a poet who pens gobbledygook and drivel? Or do you consider yourself a seer with oracular powers? Or are you a madman?" asked the leader.

"I know that I'm neither of the first two beings. I cannot tell you about the last one. How can I myself tell whether I'm unhinged or not?"

The leader said: "You can be whatever you would like to be. We are not concerned about this or that. We will kill you now. Our mission is to kill men".

I ask: "In what manner will you kill me? Will you cut me with a knife? Will you shoot me? Will you club me to death?"

"We will shoot you".

"With which gun will you shoot me then? Made in India, or made in another country?"

"Foreign-made. All of them made in Germany, made in Russia, or made in China. We don't use guns made in India. Let alone good guns, India cannot even make plastic flowers. When asked to make plastic flowers India can only produce toothbrushes".

I said: "That's a good thing. Of what use are plastic flowers without any fragrance?"

The leader said: "No one keeps toothbrushes in vases to do up a room. In life,

a little embellishment has its part".

"Whatever it may be, if you must shoot me please shoot me with a gun made in India. I don't want to die from a foreign bullet. You see, I love India very much".

"That can never be. Your wish cannot be granted. Don't ever mention Bharat to us".

Saying this, they left without killing me; as if they didn't do anything at all. Being fastidious about death, I escaped with my life.

If one face of the region is illiberal Bharat with its development and guns, the other is the authoritarian regimes that have emerged in resistance to Bharat. In order not to be Bharat, these revolutionary brothers and (very few) sisters outline a full quota of dos and don'ts for our everyday life. And like Bharat, these guides for responsible behaviour and expression are also backed by violence. But unlike Bharat, this prescriptive violence has its legitimacy deriving from communitarian impulses and authentic national Naga, Mizo, Aomiyi, Kok Borok, Meitei, Hynniewtrep, Karbi, Dimas, Boro identity.

This war of legitimacy implies a public sphere in siege. A war of nationalisms, where the only vision is the impending victory of the singular, while the plural pleasures of life keep getting eternally postponed. This also means that the only language spoken is a language of absolutes, of either THIS or THAT ; anything else seen as diversionary and divisive.

In most accounts of the 'state-centred', or law-centred, or should I say 'liberal' accounts of censorship, freedom of expression is seen as a form of civil liberty or liberty from state interference. But such accounts ignore the possibility that everyday public expression in my world is restricted not because of the illegality of such expression, but because of the fear of social or community embarrassment, exclusion and/or violence. Moreover, the neat divide eagerly hypothesised by liberals, between the restrictive Indian state and so-called 'free' civil society ; the fissure that accommodates civil resistance to state oppression ; itself becomes untenable.

Package Tours

It was one of those events for which Shillong has become a popular summer destination ; seminars and workshops from 'Mainland' India. Almost every big Indian project nowadays, seems to have a Northeast component. There is money and opportunity to converse with the malcontents of the nation. So there it was ; a seminar on Peace, Conflict Resolution, or something like that. Mainland sends intellect and we in the region provide the informants, in these well-scripted sessions. We complain about Indian apathy, Mainland racism, 'Core' exploiting the 'Periphery'; or in moments of desperation, evoke the 'I'-word: imperialism. And if the seminarists are vaguely 'liberals' of the Indian variety, then there are some guilt-ridden Mainland presentations, and that is it. But as it sometimes happens, just sometimes, the script tends to get screwed up.

That day, a young researcher from the region who was researching ethnicity, violence, small arms (or something like that) decided to politely, in dry, data-saturated seminar prose,

mention that great unmentionable ; the Naga assumptions of unity and their behaviour vis-à-vis the Kukis.

In terms of performance it was not incendiary or emotional enough to be considered a breach of etiquette, but a serious breach of etiquette it was. A breach which some of us tried to fill by mildly patronising comments such as "how young people these days have no sense of what they are supposed to speak", to a stronger and louder challenge by a lady ; I shall describe her (using the popular phrase) as a 'representative of civil society' ; who invited the speaker to come to the lady's own turf of Manipur, where the speaker's irresponsibility would be provided a fitting lesson. She counselled the researcher against making irresponsible claims, and that too in front of Mainland outsiders. Moreover, "civil society" ; I distinctly remember her using the phrase ; should not be discussing contentious topics.

Before the sanctity of the chair and calm of reasonable behaviour and lunch prevailed, for those unscripted, very, very few *shongshit* (exciting) minutes, with their suggestions of violence and wagging fingers, I realised that in our world we have to abide by the rule that we do not wash our dirty nylons in public; we are responsible speakers whose solemn duty is to not rock the boat. You cannot do things like Robin S. Ngangom.

Revolutionaries

A poem by Robin S. Ngangom

Before they used terror when things were beginning to go out of control and people showed aberrant behaviour, revolutionaries had asked poets in their lower ranks to compose patriotic songs for a country that cannot be found on any map. They would even coerce nocturnal drivers of interstate buses to play tapes of one-act plays that are designed to make unsuspecting passengers weep with patriotic shame. I know this for real; I grew up with revolutionaries. They had even asked me to translate a press release over the phone.

Before he became the sharpshooter of a revolutionary band, my childhood friend smelled of straw and cattle; and then one day he bridled a horse and rode it hard through a busy marketplace, scattering customers and traders alike like straw in a gale. I was told that he buried a pistol in my cousin's backyard just before he went under the ground. Only after he came over ground with the venerable title 'teacher', because he was trained by Chinese masters, did I meet him on the street, and he smelled of designer clothes. He now keeps himself occupied with work contracted out by the public works department, and once asked me if I was married. He has two wives, one of them an actor.

When they are not around, they become butts of fun. The roving story then was of a wastrel who went home after midnight because he had wasted all his time with his layabout friends around a fire one winter night. He had to cross a walled house guarded by fierce dogs to reach his home. When the owner of the house who was

woken up by the dogs asked, "Who goes there?" the wastrel found his wits and replied, "In the service of the motherland", in a solemn voice as one would expect a revolutionary to reply.

When they became arbiters when someone's duck was stolen or two women were fighting over one man, I stopped being furious with them.

You should write when you can still laugh at yourself and the world, before you give yourself up to despair.

But maybe my despair is my inauthentic Northeastern self. My recounting of silencings in my part of the world as negative acts is inspired by my *dkhamess*.⁵ Rather than renounce the pleasures of Mainland aesthetics of the blockbuster Hindi film song *Kajraref*, I choose to focus on problems of renunciation. In the times of revolutionary struggles of identity, I play divisive games of inappropriate quotations. Because the 'authentic' Northeastern blood does not flow through my veins, I cannot understand the need to protect the purity of identity. Freedom of expression, free speech good, *mo*, but not now, we are at war.

While for the majority of people, the Indian state illegitimately stutters in as foulmouthed, foreign-tongued patrol checkpoints and alien-sounding 'development' schemes,⁶ the local defenders of authentic identity can act as the script doctors of cheaply produced video romances and fashion the correct length and style of hair for men and women; and also get thanked for these and other actions. Even a partial list of such exemplary actions is impressive:

1. In Manipur, Bollywood films and Hindi film music are banned by all 32 groups of the revolutionary brigade. The ban is implemented on the grounds of the revolutionary claim that Bollywood is having a bad influence on Manipuri youth and culture. The ban is also supposed to help the cause of Manipuri cinema and culture. Thanks to the ban, Manipuri films, most of them made on digital video (DV), start to be screened in theatres. But rather than feel smug about the success of these indigenous films, one of the groups, Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), recently banned even these DV products, claiming that these films were Meitei only in terms of language and actors, they had nothing to do with Manipur's proud cultural tradition. The ban is now removed after the filmmakers approached the UNLF (United National Liberation Front), a group with more influence than KCP, who decided to convince KCP to lift the ban. In the course of their action, the UNLF also lectures the filmmakers about their responsibilities towards the greater cultural good of the Meitei community.

2. The May 2004 issue of *Man's World*, the nth Indian version of *Esquire* magazine, which has a trite piece on Shillong, is taken off the stands after the Khasi Students Union's literary commission pronounced the piece *kyntait* (a reject), with its descriptions of drunks with names like Friday Lyngdoh and Boldness Nongrum blighting a hill station with more hype than air.

3. Clerical censorship of any reference to condoms, so that there is not even a token signboard advocating condom use in Shillong.⁷

4. The Naga Students Federation decides to act as gatekeepers for research on Nagaland (or should I say, Nagalim).

5. In Guwahati, an academic lecture on the Nellie Massacre (that involved the slaughter of Muslims during the Assam movement), is disrupted by the state department of home affairs, after the guardians of Axomiya identity pronounce any discussion of Nellie to be a danger to public order.

6. In Mizoram, heavy metal music is public disgrace for some years due to allegations of Satanism. It finds itself back in favour only when that musical travesty called 'metal gospel' arrives to counter the godlessness of pure metal.

7. Staying with Mizoram, try discussing and writing about the community policing and administration of vigilante justice by the darlings of civil society, the Young Mizo Association.

8. Or enter the script war. You could be maimed (or even killed) by questioning the merits of Roman as a script for Kok Borok or Bodo^a

And Then the Pleasant Dream...

I am aware that in my listing of all-consuming restrictions in everyday life, the Northeast seems to compare really badly to life elsewhere, where freedom of expression exists without too many state and societal restrictions. Life in my world, therefore, seems to need a redemption from its repressed and repressive existence. For the liberal imagination, what we need are some humanitarian interventions or civics lessons on the subject of the value of free speech; perhaps these will teach us to arrive at democratic truth. Like an abstract good, free speech will act like an arbiter of civilisation for us. And once the truth of free speech is made self-evident, we can all lazily speak and listen freely (and thank our liberal teachers). No one would knock at our doors at midnight and instruct us about our responsibilities towards our world.

But before you extol the virtues of freedom and rebuild our world, one needs to remember that our life, squeezed between India and anti-India, is not just made up of silences which get broken in Delhi when we have seminars there on censorship, featuring panels titled 'Silences from Srinagar to Shillong'. Censors are active because speakers too are active. Speakers are active because the struggles of our life cannot be boxed into neat compartments of competing nationalisms.

Maybe by emphasising silence, I can produce a good project proposal for the National Endowment for Democracy, but then that would be to deny someone like E.N. Sun, who in his precarious bestselling irritation to good Khasi taste, sings unpatriotic ribaldry, and manages not to sing of Pyrthei and U Blei; Earth and God. Emphasising silence would be to deny the gossip which 'Letters to the Editor' peddle between sponsored press releases by state and non-state. Anarchy of Shillong or Aizawl Room in IRC would anyway be suspicious of my intentions if it heard that I was out there in Delhi selling the silence of Shillong.

If Robin's or Mona's or Kympham's or Ibomcha's or Ibopishak's poetic sniping exists, then I cannot view free speech as some instrumental measure of flat and free society. Censorship and freedom of expression is a political struggle where the decisions about what we can and cannot say or listen to, cannot be philosophically or morally idealised, but will have to be experienced and acted upon within the larger conflict of social possibilities.

Maybe silences do not exist in themselves at all; maybe they are created because we choose not to struggle to listen, to speak. And that, I can tell you, is truly difficult.

*I was having a dream, a very pleasant one,
it began almost like a nightmare.
It was our home, quite dark inside;
on the floor of the house, their entrails spilling,
bodies of children lie about
like rats run over by vehicles.
I tread cautiously, taking long steps.
But walking on running blood
my soles are sticky anyway.*

*Very carefully, with great effort,
I emerged, opening the door,
there lay before me a long road unrolled.
In the distance, hazy and blurred,
some people were strolling too.
Gun barrels stick out in neat rows
from both the left and the right side of the road.
Muzzles of guns;
even in the nooks and shaded spots
of fields and meadows.
One gun barrel near my cheek,
another muzzle beside my lips.*

*Someone shouted; Fire!
O they've opened fire, I've been shot.
A bullet struck my cheek.
But what's this!
Is being shot by a gun as silky as the caress
of a young woman's soft hand!
How happy I am being shot,
This bullet shooting into my mouth
is also a mellow grape.
I shout; If grapes are bullets,
shoot me again and again!"
This is all a dream.
I know I'm dreaming even when I'm sleeping.
But I don't want to wake up just yet.*

Who else will dream such a dream?



This text was first presented at a seminar on Free Speech and Censorship in South Asia, jointly organised by Delhi Film Archive, Sarai-CSDS and the Max Mueller Bhavan/Goethe Institute, February 2006, Delhi.

NOTES

1. Yumlembam Ibomcha. *Story of a Dreamf*. Translated from the Manipuri by Robin S. Ngangom.
2. White man.
3. The Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act (1958) is a legislation enacted by the Indian parliament into law after the President of India signed his assent to it on 11 September 1958. The law was based on a similar British law used in the region. It remains in force (in a much more extensive form) today. The AFSPA, first implemented in Assam and Manipur, has in the course of the last 48 years been deployed in Punjab in the 1980s and in Jammu and Kashmir since the early 1990s.

For a detailed overview of the AFSPA, see "Armed Forces Special Powers Act: A Study in National Security Tyranny" by South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre.

(http://www.hrds.net/sahrdc/resources/armed_forces.html)

See also Nandita Haksar (1991), "Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958", paper for the Human Rights Committee at the UN, pp. 11-12.

For a detailed analysis of the history of the AFSPA in Manipur, see "Another 9/11, Another Act of Terror: The 'Embedded Disorder' of the AFSPA" by A. Bimol Akoijam, in *Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts* (Delhi, 2005), pp. 481-91. The AFSPA allows the "use of armed forces" defined as "military forces, the air forces operating as land forces" and "any other forces" of the Union (Section 3) within the nation, in domestic space. For the AFSPA to come into force, all that is required is that a territory (a state of the Indian Union,

a centrally-administered territory or any part of) be described as "disturbed". Once an area is this declared, the personnel of the armed forces simultaneously acquire powers to use "force as may be necessary", based on their "opinion" and "suspicion", to effect "arrest without warrant", or "fire upon or otherwise use force, even to causing death"⁹ These powers can also be exercised for acts that are "likely to be made", or even "about to [be] commit[ted]" (Section 4).

Unlike the assumption of innocence of an 'accused' or a 'suspect' (until he or she is proven guilty) in normal criminal law, a significant measure that protects a citizen, it is taken for granted that the intention of the inhabitants of the space that is rendered "disturbed" by the simple fact of the declaration of the AFSPA, is hostile towards military personnel.

In all other Indian laws, including various preventive detention and anti-terrorist legislations (National Security Act), Terrorist and Disturbed Areas Act, Prevention of Terrorism Act, etc.), the forces of law and order can (or could) at the most detain without trial, for varying lengths of time. However, the AFSPA gives the armed forces personnel additional power to shoot to kill, or destroy property, on the basis of a mere suspicion. The Act empowers the armed forces to do away with the legal fiction of the 'encounter' killing, and to act as judge, prosecutor and executioner all at once, and often in the course of an instant.

Hence, attacks by 'insurgents' are 'retaliated' with indiscriminate firing and killing of civilians, including women and children, by the security forces. These noncombatant casualties can then be seen as instances of 'collateral damage'. Therefore, the numerous cases of massacre in the so-called 'crossfire' or 'exercises' of the army are not examples of the 'abuse' of, but the 'use' of, the AFSPA.

Acts committed under the ambit of the AFSPA cannot be challenged by those who bear the brunt of its implementation: "No prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding shall be instituted, except with the previous sanction of the Central Government, in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act" (Section 6). In effect, Section 6 brings to bear one legal regime for people in the states and territories affected by the AFSPA, and another for the rest of India.

4. Poem by Thangjam Ibopishak. Translated from the Manipuri by Robin S. Ngangom. This poem was censored out of a recent India International Centre publication on the Northeast edited by Journalist/Development Expert/Mentor for the Region/World Bank Satellite Sanjoy Hazarika.
5. *Dkhar*: a non-Khasi non-tribal. A non-Khasi tribal would be *kaikhlaw* (jungle dweller), and my daughter would be *shipiah* (half-anna, half-breed).
6. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Sampoorana Grameen Rozgar Yojana, Rashtriya Samakritik Vikas¹⁰
7. Although there are no public ads for condoms, distributing condoms means big money in the AIDS industry of the region, where more people living off AIDS than are dying of it. Recently, an activist from an NGO known for its 'cures' for homosexuality supposedly claimed, in a BBC-produced TV game show hosted by a Bollywood actor, that she was distributing condoms through *kwai* (betelnut) sellers. Rather than take umbrage at her inflated claims of one *kwai*/one condom, the press and some NGOs went into a rage of communitarian moralism. The Press Club asked her for an apology, and an NGO put up the spectacle of a public hearing about her attempts at denigrating the *jaidbenriew* (community). No one mentioned the corruption underlying the episode.

Poetry in a Time of Terror

ROBIN S. NGANGOM

There is no such thing as an innocent bystander. If you are a bystander, you are not innocent.

i Czeslaw Milosz

I wrote my first faltering line in the relative innocence of childhood. I was about eleven or twelve years old then, and caught as I was in the flush of youth, I wanted to explore the world by writing ornate and sentimental poetry. Since life was ignoring me, I thought I could engage the attention of kindred hearts through friendly and softhearted verse. Naturally, my poems were mostly inspired by romances and adventure stories, especially *The Thousand and One Nights*, but it was essentially dreamy-eyed adolescent stuff. I still haven't grown out of it.

One favourite poem of mine began with these lines: The boy stood on the burning deck^a f That well-meaning world is no longer recognisable now; the sacred landmarks have disappeared long since. Only dim memories of hoisting the country's flag on a holiday, or leading a blind man by the hand, or praying in temples on a feast day, remain as mute reminders of that sacred past. Manipur, my native place in Northeast India, is in a state of anarchy, and my poetry springs from the cruel contradictions of that land. Manipur boasts of its talents in theatre, cinema, dance and sports. But how could you trust your own people, when they entrust corruption, AIDS, terrorism and drugs to their children?

Naturally, the Manipur that I ritually go back to from the laid-back hill town of Shillong every year is not the sacred world of my childhood, because

*Childhood took place
 free from manly fears
 when I had only my mother's love
 to protect me from knives,
 from fire, and death by water.
 I wore it like an amulet.
 Childhood took place
 among fairies and weretigers
 when hills were yours to tumble
 before they became soldiers' barracks
 and dreaded chambers of torture.*

*Childhood took place
 before your friend worshipped a gun
 to become a widowmaker.¹*

Having acknowledged this growing restlessness within myself, poetry became an outlet for pent-up feelings and desires, where I can bare myself without actually being demonstrative. Poetry, therefore, has remained an underground exercise with me. It perhaps began as a dialogue with the self, and has become an illegitimate affair of the heart, because I believe in the poetry of feeling, which can be shared; not cerebral, intellectual poetry which is inaccessible, and which leaves the reader outside the poet's insulated world. I suppose I've always tried in a naïve way to invite the reader into my small world. Perhaps I've written poems because I've felt this desperate need to be understood, and to be accepted:

*I want to describe myself again and again
 to people who do not know me.
 That is why I always look for paper and ink,
 even in the midst of a terrible loss,
 or, a dangerous illness.
 Because someone said
 the spoken word flies
 but the written word stays.²*

In many ways, my own Meitei culture, which is part of my childhood, has shaped my thinking. Perhaps we all mourn the fate of our homeland, as the Sicilian poet Quasimodo has said. And though I've never remotely imagined myself as any conscience-keeper, I've often tried to speak of my people, and of the terrible things happening in Manipur:

*First came the scream of the dying
in a bad dream, then the radio report,
and a newspaper: six shot dead, twenty-five
houses razed, sixteen beheaded with hands tied
behind their backs inside a church^a
As the days crumbled, and the victors
and their victims grew in number,
I hardened inside my thickening hide,
until I lost my tenuous humanity.*

*I ceased thinking
of abandoned children inside blazing huts
still waiting for their parents.
If they remembered their grandmothers' tales
of many winter hearths at the hour
of sleeping death, I didn't want to know,
if they ever learnt the magic of letters.
And the women heavy with seed,
their soft bodies mown down
like grain stalk during their lyric harvests;
if they wore wildflowers in their hair
while they waited for their men,
I didn't care anymore.*

*I burnt my truth with them,
And buried uneasy manhood with them.
I did mutter, on some far-off day:
There are limits, but when the day
absolved the butchers, I continued to live
as if nothing happened.³*

But it may be mistaken to see only geographical, or cultural, or linguistic differences. I don't agree with the view that a writer requires a tradition to lean upon, to till the soil which others have made fertile, and harvest ideas for himself. A writer can be influenced by anything, and he would be able to write in any country other than his own. But he has to reclaim his individual voice. It is natural for someone from the Northeast of India to exploit the folk traditions he grew up with, to write of the hills when he is living in the hills. It is Shillong that has moved me into this kind of poetry, Shillong with its gentle hills, the Khasis with their rich oral literature:

*I told you the stories of old
on soft Sundays, of Manik Raitong
and Ka Likai. Only the stones of unknown gorges
weep for them, I said.*

*We awakened sleeping melodies
and talked of native lands,
and my foolish youth.
Where the pines
read the lips of the wind
and silent rain drums the hills,
the cottages dry their eyes
and open them in the dusk.
The land of the seven huts,
they've named these hills.
You would belong here
if you would listen to your heart.⁴*

If I had not made use of this hillworld, my poetry would have been false. You would notice this preponderance of images from the hills in many of my poems; the vast pines, the mountains with their great rains. But this, I've realised, is mostly artless, inoffensive poetry.

For someone who has suffered from a fundamental poverty of experience, I've been naturally inclined towards the personal lyric. I don't have faith in inspiration, but since poetry cannot originate in a vacuum, I've also left my influences open, and have allowed myself to be ambushed; by political events, books, biased memory, a dogged sexuality, womankind, films, streets even. But my poetry seems to be drifting towards something more. It is no longer a mere diary of private incidents, or a confessional. I've been trying to come to terms with this change of heart, which is even more distressing than the shattered love of a woman. And I've perhaps opened my eyes to insistent realities and have stepped out of the proverbial ivory tower. If anyone should ask now why my poems do not speak of my land's breathtaking landscapes, its sinuous dances, its dark-maned women, I can only offer Neruda's answer: Come and see the blood in the streets!⁵

The writer from Northeast India, consequently, differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way. While it may not make him a better writer, living with the menace of the gun does not permit him to indulge in verbal wizardry or woolly aesthetics, but is a constant reminder that he must perforce master the art of witness⁶. Forces working under slogans that have been twisted, slogans such as self-determination, rive my society. We have witnessed growing ethnic aggressiveness, secessionist ventures, cultural and religious bigotry, the marginalisation of minorities and the poor, profit and power struggles in government, and as a natural aftermath to these, the banality of corruption and the banality of terror. Further, the uneasy coexistence of paradoxical worlds such as the folk and the

Westernised, virgin forests and car-choked streets, ethnic cleansers and the parasites of democracy, ancestral values and flagrant materialism, resurgent nativism and the sensitive outsider's predicament, make the picturesque Northeast especially vulnerable to tragedy.

And what can a poet-aspirant do in such contrary circumstances, when he can no longer nurse a magical vision of the world? For the first time, I've begun to understand Camus's words: Whatever our personal weaknesses may be, the nobility of our craft will always be rooted in two commitments, difficult to maintain: the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance to oppression⁷. Today, when cruel suppositions are made about the conceit of the artist, innuendoes that the poet has become a world unto himself and should be brought to his knees; when there is a sharp divide between modish criticism and literature, when literary schools are merely reactionary and seem to be turning their eyes from what is known as the human condition, I would again like to reaffirm my indebtedness to my fellow men. Today, when heartrending events are happening all around a poet, when all he hears are chilling accounts of what man has done to man, how can he close his eyes to the brutalisation of life and remain solipsistic? Anyone with even an iota of conviction is in immediate danger if he speaks up; a gun points at you if you don't observe a prescribed code of behaviour; how then can I claim that I am living in a free society?

In contemporary Manipuri poetry, there is a predominance of images of bullets^f, blood^f, mother^f, the colour red^f and, paradoxically, flowers^f too. A poet from Imphal told me of how they've been honing the poetry of survival^f with guns pressed to both temples: the gun of revolution and the gun of the state. Hardly anyone writes romantic verse or talks about disturbing aspects of sexuality because they are absorbed in writing the poetry of survival. This has resulted in criticism that contemporary Manipuri poetry is hemmed in by extreme realism. There is, of course, a danger of the images listed above becoming hackneyed. And maybe poets should try to strike that fine balance between realism and reflection, as Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai skilfully does in *The Diameter of the Bomb*^f. The opening lines of this poem read like statistics and a news report that we often ignore as we go on with our daily lives: The diameter of the bomb was thirty centimetres/ and the diameter of its effective/ range; about seven metres/ And in it four dead and eleven wounded^f. But the lines that follow make us reflect on lives obliterated by violence; they reveal how violence transforms men and women, regardless of nationalities; and also how such mindless acts make one reflect on the indifference of a god who, if he exists at all, should never have allowed his creation to be erased or reduced to an absurd drama.

But poets also have to write about the here and now. And writing about it lends a sense of immediacy and vividness to their poetry. I call this the poetry of witness. Reviewing the Chinese émigré writer and 2000 Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian's work, translator and critic Mabel Lee comments: Alternatively, the nonconformist could remain in conventional society and survive by feigning madness or could achieve freedom, transcendence and self-realisation in literary and artistic creation⁸. In Manipur, when the reality becomes oppressive, a few poets frequently seek refuge in absurdist irony often directed towards oneself, in parody, and in satire. It is a rejection by these poets of the extreme realism I've

mentioned; they in turn, also reveal an inclination towards the surreal. In Manipuri poet Y. Ibomcha's *Story of a Dream*, murderous bullets turn into luscious fruits, and in Thangjam Ibopishak's *I Want to be killed by an Indian Bullet*, terrorists appear in the guise of the five elements. This kind of verse is a reaction to the absurdity of violence and death, when the Manipuri poet's existence is reduced to negotiating the subject matter of guiltless addicts, child soldiers, and young mothers with AIDS.

Literature that is not the breath of contemporary society, that dares not transmit the pains and fears of that society, that does not warn in time against threatening moral and social dangers; such literature does not deserve the name of literature; it is only a façade, claims Alexander Solzhenitsyn. But here lies a paradox, because the writer is not beholden to anyone, let alone to society. He must be true only to his own world and to himself. A writer is not a self-assigned conscience-keeper. Living in society, he will talk about his milieu, the people with whom he is in touch with daily. But you cannot expect a writer to consciously promote, say, ethnic harmony, as a part of his writing programme. You cannot expect a writer to be a public relations official on behalf of any organisation, or a propagandist for any cause. On the other hand, there is often a defiant and self-damaging streak in him that sometimes incites him to confront authority. When in 1964 Joseph Brodsky was asked by Soviet authorities what he did for a living, he replied that he wrote poetry; he was immediately arrested on the charge of social parasitism. Is the writer a social parasite or a conscience-keeper for his society? One thing is certain; he values his freedom above everything else, and will protect it fiercely.

I think the task that literature of the Northeast must address is what Albert Camus called the double challenge of truth and liberty. Truth, because what can the writer hope to accomplish now except to tell the truth? When the unspeakable is out there, being enacted and quickly consigned to oblivion, when cruel things are done but never undone, and when media machines are busy feeding the world one-sided lies, the writer can only tell the truth about what he knows. Literature cannot bring harmony or a moral revolution by telling us what we must do. And forces are always at work to rob the writer of his freedom. Liberty, therefore, is a necessary precondition, which the writer must fight for in order to tell the truth he knows; freedom is the lifeblood of his art.

During these pessimistic times, the responsibility of the writer is much more modest than what well-meaning people would like him to shoulder, that is, to change the world into a better place through his efforts. But at most, poetry of the Northeast can only mirror the body and the mind of the times, as in Thangjam Ibopishak's *Poem*:

*Now, in this country
One cannot speak aloud,
One cannot think in the open.
Hence poem,
Like a flower I sport with you.
Before my eyes, incident upon incident,*

*Awesome, heaving events,
Walking, yet sleeping,
Eyes open, but dreaming,
Standing, yet having nightmares;
In dreams, and in reality
Only fearsome, shivery instances.
So around me, closing eyes,
Palms on ears,
Moulding the heart to a mere clay object,
I write poems about flowers.*

*Now, in this land
One should only think of flowers,
Dream about flowers,
For my little baby, my wife,
For my job,
To protect myself from harm.*

Surrounded as we are by playthings we don't need, when a man's worth is determined by what he can buy, we are continuously taught to be grateful to the capitalist god. What we have inherited then are the tyrannical fetishes of market capitalism, murderous technologies, and grisly ideologies that would leave a cursed earth for our children. How can poetry sing the praises of this age, or compose hymns to Mammon? For me, poetry can never be an ally of this numbing materialism or a party to mindless violence. Materialism, wherever it abounds, begets a particular kind of terrifying alienation, for the simple reason that we forfeit our ability to love when we place commodities above our fellow men. And someone who cannot love is always alone.

These hostile forces have often compelled poetry to burrow deeper into itself; it has retreated into its shell of obscurity and isolation. In such precarious times, writing poetry is always a defiant gesture that poets make against power and money, insensitivity and terror. Poetry cannot help anyone to get on in life, or make a successful human being out of anyone. But poetry should move us; it should change us in such a manner that we remain no longer the same after we've read a meaningful poem. For all these reasons, a poet can never be a conformist. He may not be an anarchist, a nihilist, or an inquisitor, but by the token of his verse, he is a natural dissident. Czeslaw Milosz questions the efficacy of poetry in his *Dedication*^f: What is poetry which does not save/ Nations or people?/ A connivance with official lies/ A song of drunkards whose throats will be cut in a moment^a^f But he will also not espouse his native language or champion his people's cause unquestioningly. As he says in *My Faithful Mother Tongue*^f:

*Now, I confess my doubt.
 There are moments when it seems to me I have squandered my life.
 For you are a tongue of the debased,
 Of the unreasonable, hating themselves
 Even more than they hate other nations,
 A tongue of informers,
 A tongue of the confused,
 Ill with their own innocence.*

Poetry is always an act of subversion. And paradoxically, the poet is perhaps the most ironic realist. No more for him the security of an ivory tower or the temptations of Utopia. In *Who Is a Poet?*, the Polish writer and poet Tadeusz Różewicz offers with certitude an ambivalent definition:

*a poet is one who writes verses
 and one who does not write verses*

*a poet is one who throws off fetters
 and one who puts fetters on himself*

*a poet is one who believes
 and one who cannot bring himself to believe*

*a poet is one who has told lies
 and one who has been told lies*

*one who has been inclined to fall
 and one who raises himself*

*a poet is one who tries to leave
 and one who cannot leave*

Each word must be fashioned from a private hurt, and writing poetry is like trying to keep a deadline with death. Perhaps I am always dying/ Yet I listen willingly to the words of life/ that I have never understood^a *f* wrote Quasimodo. That is why I've always felt that poetry should not merely amuse us or make us think: it should comfort us, and it must heal the heart of man.

NOTES

1. Robin S. Ngangom. *A Libran Horoscope*. Unpublished poem, 2000.
2. . *I Want to Describe Myself*. Unpublished poem, 1995.
3. . *Native Land*. In *New Statesman & Society*, London, 14 July 1995, p. 41.
4. . *I Told You the Stories*. Unpublished poem, 1992.
5. Pablo Neruda. *I'm explaining a Few Things*. In *Selected Poems* (Penguin Books, 1985, Harmondsworth).
6. Michael Ignatieff. *The Art of Witness*. In *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XLII, No. 5 (23 March 1995).
7. Albert Camus, Nobel Prize acceptance speech, 1957.
8. Gao Xingjian. *Soul Mountain* (Introduction), transl. Mabel Lee (Perennial/Harper Collins, 2001).

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Turbulent Indigo and the Act of Cautious Reassemblage

SAMPURNA CHATTARJI

Brash fields crude crows/ In a scary sky/ In a golden frame/ Roped off/ Tourists guided by ¹

Standing in the van Gogh room of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, I find myself in tears. Before me are paintings I have seen so far in books and diaries sent to me by friends who live abroad. Nothing has prepared me for the leap of colour, the vivid, vital violence. And yet there is not only violence, but also a great and tender tranquillity. The twisted trees, the red swirls, the gouged lines are there, incandescent around me, but so also a softness I never knew van Gogh to possess. The 1890 painting of the peasant couple in *Noon: Rest (after Millet)*; shoes, sickles lying next to their supine bodies; transfixes me in a way I cannot explain. I look at the unending yellows, the gold, the blue, the white, the soft light in the shade of the haystack. And I weep for the beauty of *Noon...*, as much as I do for the terror of the dark and glowing apparition across the room, the other painting of house-path-sky-figure, consumed by a great and tangible dread. All I have read about the artist rushes into my throat. I am choked with sorrow for a man who painted his dread.

You see him with his shotgun there?/ Bloodied in the wheat?/ Oh, what do you know about/ Living in Turbulent Indigo ²

The moment, like all moments of intensified feeling, passes. Back in Mumbai, I turn to the same paintings in my book of reproductions, and yearn for the colour that is not there. Leached out in mass-produced glossiness, I see shadow-paintings, inanimate, constrained.

I do not see myself falling headlong into an emotional vortex, propelled by the sheer fact of brush on canvas. I need tactility, to imagine myself into another's skin; I need materiality, proximity.

Or else I need poetry^athe intense zest which heightens a thing out of the level of prose³. I need the hard, absolute, unflinching gaze, "the sunset-conductor, whose wide sweep gathered the scattered flutes of tree-bound birds, the grieving harps of insects, the creak of branches, and the crunch of stones"⁴. I need to be able to look, and not look away.

"I'm a burning hearth", he said/ "People see the smoke/ But no one comes to warm themselves/ Sloughing off a coat"⁵

And there is much I have wanted to look away from. Shutting out is so much easier than letting in. "A poem is related to flight", said the Russian poet and theorist Velimir Khlebnikov. But what he meant was not escape, which is merely a willingness to go the greatest possible distance in the shortest possible time. He meant a lift-off into the great unseen turbulence of image and thought. The further you go, the closer you come.

Does that work, in reality?

Reality is a woman clutching a baby, both in rags, faces distorted with grief for the men the sea has swallowed. Reality is a hand sticking out from under the rubble of what was once a school. Reality is cold gnawing at the skin; hunger gnawing at the stomach. Reality is the squelch of mud and blood, the stench of death, the sound of shovel and pyre. Reality is a bloated carcass floating down a flooded road.

Since the 26 December tsunami in 2005, images have piled up, like corpses. Aviation disasters. The London bombing. The Mumbai floods. The Kashmir earthquake. The Delhi blasts. Technology ripping into a freefall of frozen bodies through empty sky. Technology ripping into splintering skin and metal, below ground and above. Who shall we blame when the ground itself turns unstable, rearing up in a cataclysm of crevasses, great wounds of mud and stone? Who shall we blame when the sky itself breaks down in a relentless battering of rain?

We find culprits enough. Reality has a way of coping, far fiercer than words.

But the word leads a double life. The word is caught between sound and sense, between flight and return.

I return to the word.

*Great poems told us that nature
would never betray us, but that
really wasn't the point, was it?
And then the theatre of cruelty
stopped being shocking.
We all knew why.*⁶

Why write poetry, in turbulent times? Why, when the seams of meaning come apart, and words reel, exhausted and hoarse with shouting, the same words, used over and over again, printed, spoken, emblazoned into obsolescence? What will we say next?

We will, like Apollinaire, make the tongue "that goldfish in the bowl of your voice". We will, like Rimbaud, "find flowers that are chairs". We will, like Lorca, listen for "a wind, a mental wind blowing relentlessly over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unknown accents". We will, like Agha Shahid Ali, "let night begin/ without any light".

We will try to see, anew.

Can we?

Perhaps. Because in poetry lies the use of language that attempts nothing more, nothing less, than the tentative. The indirect, dance-mode of going nowhere but towards a sense of troubled epiphany, towards a troubled, and troubling, understanding.

Too much has already been said about poetry as witness, as redress. When language itself turns turbulent, tearing at the tissue, what sanity in neatly ordered lines, in polyphonic, delayed rhymes? Can the poem, that wholly artificial construct, contain and resist the real? Is the imagination the last, and only, refuge? The imagination "pressing back against the pressure of reality"?⁷

I believe it is. Not a marginalised, maligned act of escapism and indifference, but an act of cautious reassemblage. Putting together, word by word, a way of approaching the unapproachable.

Why?

You want to know why?

Go down to the shacks then,

like shattered staves

bound in old wire

at the hour when

the sun's wrist bleeds in

the basin of the sea,

*and you will sense it.*⁸

I tried it last December. Gleaning through the papers, page after page of heartbreaking reportage, I tried reconstructing a different narrative, where the debris of words washed up by the tragedy would somehow find their way into a careful space of preservation.

I wanted the words of the survivors of the tsunami, misreported, mistranslated as they might have been, to seep into a territory where the poetic statement might act as a spar to the sorrowing one. Truth is, it was I who needed the spar, it was I who felt all the guilt of my own cocooned safety wash over me like a reproach. And so I took down quotes in my little red book, hoping to embed them into a form of recall less transient than the daily news.

I stared at the quotes for days, glassy-eyed with the memory that I had been to the very coast lashed by the tsunami a mere week before it struck. I had driven down with my

husband to Kanyakumari, and watched the dawn. I remembered the viewing tower. I remembered the man from whom I bought an opalescent mother-of-pearl conch, its sound long and clear and sweet. I wondered if he was safe, I wished I had asked his name. And then I found myself writing the following two pieces:

Kanyakumari I

*The wind of three seas
buffets me*

I lose my breath

*running to outrun the waves
'The water took them
my wife my father my three sisters'
It wasn't the wind*

It was grief

*that made me
lose my balance
lose my grip
lose*

*My sanity
floats*

Kanyakumari II

*Black crow pilgrims
drop droppings
on rock*

Can't you smell it, the stink?

*Return to the sea
its sanctity*

*Surf, cry foul
wind, seethe*

*Five hundred kilometres per hour
Eight hundred and eight killed*

*'Fish doesn't smell this way,
only rotting bodies do*

Can't you smell it, the stink?'

The first was gentler, the second a more virulent attempt to reframe the touristy within the tragic. Defecation/devastation. Sanctity/hostility. Pilgrim/tourist. Tragedy-tourist. Dualities and conflations. But how would anyone know what I meant? What point in being elliptical? And so I re-wrote:

Kanyakumari II

Dec 31, 2004. Eight hundred and eight killed in Kanyakumari district.

*Black-crow pilgrims
robes gathered for the squat*

*in the pearl-dawn light
they line the rock*

*their droppings
litter the air.*

*Clap hands on nose
Can't you smell it, the stink?*

*Escape to the viewing tower
Immerse in surf your gaze.*

*Here where the air is clear the sea
retains its sanctity*

*The wind is strong and clean
The waves serene.*

'It all happened in a flash'.

*Black rocks wiped bare
'Fish doesn't smell this way,
only rotting bodies do.
Can't you smell it*

the stink?'

I had inserted into my poem, apart from the (yet) unidentified quotes, the rituals of the newspaper report. A date, a time, a place, an incident. I, a believer in poetry, had abandoned faith and used a newspaper device to root my poem in reality, to make it make sense. How, then, could I claim the poem's efficacy? Had I not betrayed it, and with it, my own intentions, well-meaning and misplaced? Would I have to add footnotes now to my poem, citing name, age and provenance of the men and women whose words I used to comment on my own? Would this turn from a poem into a monster of mixed allegiances and uncertain truths? Whatever happened to poetry?

What happened was that this poet wasn't up to the task. Writing poetry is as much a matter of the gut as it is of good intentions. Sometimes, silence is better. And so:

December 26, 2004

no poetry in rictus

each word a spar to be clung to

postponing the moment of

drowning

in tears

listen well

it isn't a cliché to mourn

It may sound clichéd, but distance and time make better poets of us. Immediacy is a reporter's game. For poetry to be what the poet Seamus Heaney calls "a protagonist in the public arena, to answer back with a clear tongue when the world gets muddled and bloodied", the poet has to engage in more than mere response. Immerse in silence, in withdrawal, none of which makes for good copy. So treacherous the realm of negotiating disaster with nothing more (nothing less) than words. And what of language as the ultimate act of violence? What of atrocity getting "flattened into the causally 'atrocious'"⁹, or getting "fattened up into that debased form of imagination which is prurience"¹⁰? What of predicaments so far removed from poetry as to be almost unreachable?

Or was it merely the old proximity that was turning my bones to water, my words to mud? More than two years ago, on 11 March 2004, the Madrid bombings and a call for poems from around the world led me to this poem. I had wrestled then too, but I had not given up. Perhaps my heart was colder then, or perhaps all I needed was distance, agonies many-times removed to find themselves deliquescing on paper. I wrote and rewrote, and this is what finally appeared in the collection *Poems for Madrid*:¹¹

Travel Sickness

*No rapture can transport me now.
Only metal, beaten into place around my heart.
I trust it, blindly, as I dive in,
a swimmer in mineral dark.*

*Plain toxicity replaces the rush-hour breath
in my lungs. I inhale the nervous energy
that squeezes my diaphragm and
constricts my pupils into shining pricks of fear.*

I damage my brain. I live.

*Booby-trapped by an illusion of movement
I wait to be delivered. Any moment now
will be the last of a series of anticipations.
Any moment now will release me into the sun.*

*The next stop is mine. Till then I must carry
this backpack this cellphone this plastic bag
this paper news this silver amulet this soundless
om this coherence of faces hands and feet inside me,*

intact, blameless, unterrorised.

How equally could this have been written post- the Delhi bomb blasts, post- any of those insane 'incidents' we are all learning to live with. "It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without", wrote the poet Wallace Stevens in his 1941 essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words". For Stevens, poetry was, above all, a "revelation in words by means of the words"¹², and poetic truth that which enabled imagination to adhere to reality, rather than escape from it. For him, the pressure of reality was simply "life in a state of violence"¹³, and the "possible poet" one "capable of resisting or evading the pressure of [that] reality"¹⁴. Only by acts of "extraordinary imagination"¹⁵ could such an overwhelming pressure be cancelled out, and comprehended. Poetry was not escapism, unless it lost all moorings in reality and tended towards the abstract, the ethereal, the unmoored. Rather, poetry was self-preservation, a search for "words to express our thoughts and feelings which, we are sure, are all the truth we shall ever experience"¹⁶.

Pressure/counter-pressure. Reality/imagination. Contradictions containing and sustaining each other. Then why is it that poetry is still seen as the ultimate pacifist act, political quietism at its worst? Why is it that grappling with words as a means to contain and resist violence is not seen as resistance enough?

Perhaps some poets are activist simply through the act of making words yield more than their tired meanings, through the act of looking for "reality purified, for the 'colour of eternity', in other words, simply for beauty"¹⁷.

*Ulcer-lacerated the world
Is still afloat, offer it a fistful
Of earth a handful of heart ;*

*What, afraid it'll kill you?*¹⁸

It is fear that kills you in the end. Fear of finding beauty, fear of not finding it. Fear of the failure of language, that "disfigured and disfiguring"¹⁹ word. It is the fear of silence.

What did theoretician Maurice Blanchot mean when he wrote "the crude word is silence"? Perhaps he meant that the crude word is silence waiting to find a shape. Perhaps that shape is poetry. Oral, written. The absence of words, the presence of pauses. The measure of rhyme in each indrawn-exhaled breath. The listening ear. The ability to falter, the inability to escape. The "character of invocation common to both prayer and children's games"²⁰, the fear.

And all my little landscapes/ All my yellow afternoons/ Stack up around this vacancy/ Like dirty cups and spoons/ No mercy Sweet Jesus!/ No mercy from Turbulent Indigo.²¹

I close my book of van Gogh reproductions. I listen to the song, instead.

NOTES

1. Joni Mitchell. *Turbulent Indigo*. From the album *Turbulent Indigo* (October 1994).
2. Ibid.
3. T. E. Hulme. "Romanticism and Classicism". In (ed.) P. McGuiness, *Selected Writings* (Fyfield Books, Carcanet Press, 1998, Manchester).
4. Filippo Marinetti. "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature". In (ed.) R.W. Flint, (tr.) R.W. Flint and A.W. Coppotelli, *Marinetti: Selected Writings* (Secker & Warburg, 1972, London).
5. Joni Mitchell, op. cit.
6. Lawrence Raab. "Cruelty, Vermont (1965)", *The New Yorker*, 3 Jan 2005.
7. Wallace Stevens. "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words". In (ed.) James Scully, *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry* (Collins, 1966, London).
8. Derek Walcott. "The Estranging Sea". In *Another Life* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Cape, 1973, New York/London).
9. Christopher Ricks. *The Force of Poetry* (Clarendon Press, 1984, Oxford).
10. Ibid.

11. See www.nthposition.com, (ed.) Todd Swift, March 2004.
12. Wallace Stevens, op. cit.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Czeslaw Milosz. "On Hope". In *The Witness of Poetry* (Harvard University Press, 1983, Cambridge).
18. Joy Goswami. *Surjo-Pora Chhai* (Ashen Sun)f (Ananda Publishers, 1999, Kolkata); transl. Sampurna Chattarji (<http://india.poetryinternational.org>).
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21. Joni Mitchell, op. cit.

The Man Who Could Walk through In-Between Positions

SUREYYA EVREN

Despite Nietzsche's recognition of the interconnectedness of the forces that make up both people and the rest of the world, he replicates the perspective of one who must exclude becomings that do not originate from within that perspective. Although he is willing to risk the dissolution of stabilised forms of life, he has yet to invent a language that invites participation and the mutually constitutive production of a dialogical text. In attempting a dialogue with Nietzsche, Irigaray attempts to open up the representational system of Western thought to its unrepresentable other.¹

Turkey holds currently a candidacy for membership to the European Union, along with a few other countries. It goes without saying that there are some exceptional conditions specific to Turkey. But what I want to address in this text is not the uniqueness of Turkey's potential accession to the EU and the prospective consequences of this accession for regional and global politics. My main argument is that these kinds of major decision-making processes on the international scale compel us, the 'ordinary people', to think as diplomats do. Moreover, we are losing our authority and ability to transform our own living conditions. The necessary task of transforming our locality is totally overshadowed by the prospect of being granted EU membership, and being integrated into a much more democratic and wealthy territory ; imagined as an exquisite paradise that will warmly welcome us with the promise of mental and material salvation.

The differing views on this issue are shaped to fit two totalistic options, fit into two totalistic rooms: Yes to EU or No to EU. And it is identical on the other side of the

negotiation as well: Yes to Turkey or No to Turkey. Some critical views posit the problematic of this debate as the central issue with regard to the future expansion of the EU. However, this synthetic double bind has a more distressing impact on the side already experiencing the dread of prospective exclusion, namely Turkey.

My argument in this section of this essay focuses on the stories of 'ordinary people' and how their everyday practices relate to the ongoing diplomatic debate. I want to inquire into the ways in which major political decisions affect daily life. How do we react to these 'pyramidal' developments, with the governing elites at the apex making all decisions with regard to the governed masses at the base? What clues we can get about ourselves through examining our reactions to this formation?

Unfortunately it is not only political actors, but also intellectuals, artists, writers and philosophers who sometimes uncritically identify with the position of 'consulting for the state'. By the term 'state consultancy', I mean the act of using and mobilising knowledge for the benefits of the state. "What should the state do?" is the central concern in the rationale of such consultancy.

In these circumstances, the traditional role ascribed to the intellectual ; to reveal and communicate, in the larger social interest, the hidden truth about social reality ; disappears. In the domain of consultancy, we see the intellectual as an expert working for the benefit of those in power. Truth is no longer about either life or politics as they actually are. Truth has been imprisoned within the tight constraints of diplomacy^a

The experts hired by television channels and mainstream press are actually manipulating everybody to think this way. We watch them, believe in them, and follow their views on what should the state do. We find ourselves in this game of trying to find out which expert is closer to the truth that is in the state's best interest. Left in shadow are our lives, our decisions and our empowerment^a

The representational pressure wants to lock us into the strict dilemmas of conventional protocols. We find ourselves stuck between either 'this' or 'that' in terms of our choices. Very much like the 'love it or leave it' motto of Italian, and then US nationalists ; which has been frequently used by Turkish nationalists as well. This political logic combines with the logic of social engineering, and everything is coded by mega diplomatic projects that have little or no link to our daily lives.

By insisting on abstract questions, the consultancy-driven process forces people both from Europe and Turkey to take sides: "Do you or don't you support Turkey's entrance into the EU?" "Should Turkey be in the EU?" "Tell us which side you support^a "

We are discouraged from thinking in terms of alternatives, from deconstructing the repetitious, recursive strategies of the politically performative^a Instead, state officials 'consult' with us, and we ask the state for interpretations.

However, we can reformulate our own questions with multiple perspectives. For instance, we can ask questions such as: how does the EU process affect daily life in Turkey? How does the EU process affect the mechanisms of leftist politics, especially 'horizontal' (i.e., heterodox, grassroots, non-'pyramidal') leftist politics that disseminates the motto

Another World Is Possible ? How does the EU process affect the left's ideological core, that promises to transform our very lives? And reciprocally, how will the process of Turkey's accession to the EU affect the daily life of Europe?

Discussions run in such a way that they make people in Turkey (even figures from the left) conceive of the EU as a homogenous block; similarly, EU citizens conceive of Turkey as a homogenous entity. When we say "Turkey" or "EU", we can either understand these to mean the EU governance and the Turkish state (government and other governing elites, state, military and financial decision-makers); or quite the opposite, i.e., we can understand these to mean everyday life in the country called Turkey, and daily life in the countries under the umbrella of the EU.

The state-consultant nexus wants us to look at Turkey and the EU through the eyes of the managing elites or their consultants. This interpreting machine allows itself the convenient pleasures of strategising, pushes today's urgent political agenda to a distance, escapes into the fictive realm of planning for the future.

An editor of a Turkish socialist magazine recently said, "As long as we become more democratic at the end, it doesn't really matter who leads us there". Yet the counter-argument is that it actually matters, the path is more significant than the destination^a

These days we are witnessing how recently introduced revisions to the Constitution are being crippled by devolutionary measures, with some democratic rights being withdrawn due to pressure from the military apparatus. And sadly, there were no prominent reactions to this negative development. 'Rulers' grant some rights, some freedoms, and after a while they whimsically retract parts of these. Everything remains on paper, in closed rooms, far away from our will. Maybe the EU will keep on exerting pressure and the local government will grant some freedom again ; playing yo-yo with democracy^a

The emancipatory vision is the property of the left, we generally assume. The left aims at transforming and transvaluing life, turning it into something else, 'another world'. But in the case of Turkey, when the responsibility of transformation is ascribed to the authority of a larger political entity such as the EU ; operating absolutely from the top down, through the pyramidal formation of government hierarchy) ; the project of the left starts to lose its meaning. Why should people actually engage in a struggle to transform their locality if the EU is going to accomplish this task for them anyway? They simply feel as if they should sit and wait. ^aAfter the EU finishes this job, then we can push the democracy further^a is the kind of reasoning in charge here ; the logic of and why bother to react so fiercely to undemocratic laws, our government will have to change them anyway, if it wants to get into the EU ^a And the transformative potential of the left is generally swept away.

So, the problematic for us is not the one put forth in the familiar rhetoric of strategists giving their professional opinion as to whether Turkey should join the EU or not. Rather, the problematic concerns what action we should take during the process of contemplating and actualising another world . How are we going to refuse the false loyalties and abstract affiliations, and thereby disrupt representative politics? How can representative politics be effectively disrupted? What action is possible, when all the decisions are taken by strategists,

when we are excluded from the decision-making processes, when we are led to the illusion of inclusion, and permitted to express ourselves only through pre-formulated options?

The promise of relative democratisation coming with the bid for EU membership might even harm leftist politics, since partial, contingent, conferred freedoms are not an authentic mode of social empowerment.

Irigaray characterises the contemporary paradigmatic relationship between the masculine subject and the feminine other as based on an illusion: if the active subject were to acknowledge what 'really' happened, he would see that in the other he is changed and becomes other without recurrence.²

Isolation is not the answer to this situation, for sure. But again, obviously the left (and specifically what we conceive as the 'horizontal' left, needs to be empowered. And this would be difficult to achieve in Turkey, where various strands of nationalism and conservatism hold sway. The case of the 'nationalist left', the boosted fraction that nowadays claims the lead role in maintaining the status quo and organising the anti-EU block, is particularly repulsive. Everywhere, one witnesses the weakening of actively democratic stands and the simultaneous intensification of reactionary politics.

The *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy has also reinforced reactive sentiments against the EU. The facts of the case are now notorious: 12 editorial cartoons, most of which depicted Islam's Prophet Muhammad, were published in the Danish right-wing newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on 30 September 2005. The controversy escalated at unimaginable speed, as some or all of the cartoons were reprinted in newspapers in other countries, leading to violent protests, particularly in the Muslim world. We soon found ourselves in a virulently polarised ethos, which threatened the courageous critical voices at both ends ; the people supporting and struggling for freedom of expression in Muslim countries, and the people who strive for improvements in immigration policies and minority rights, and who sympathise with no-border campaigns in Western countries. The fantasy about the 'clash of civilisations' gained more and more committed followers.

The 'idealism' of the *Jyllands-Posten* ; trying to 'resist' the self-censorship of political correctness and 'defend' freedom of press and freedom of expression ; ironically turned into a totally negative function for 'freedom fighters' in both Western and Islamic contexts. Such an inversion quite resembles the condition of the doctor in Danish film director Lars von Trier's *Epidemic* ; the idealist figure who is not the cure, but is in fact the source, of the epidemic. Dr Mesmer (played by von Trier himself) is inadvertently spreading the very disease against which he is fighting. Since *Epidemic* (1987), over the last two decades Trier has continued to explore the theme of idealism and has been truly critical of a particular set of idealist visions and attitudes. His latest criticism is revealed in *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005), both with a backdrop of US history.

The latter film is about an imaginary plantation (Manderlay) in rural Alabama in 1933, a site where the practice of slavery is still deeply entrenched. The ethos of *Dogville*, a story

of harrowing violence and abuse in a small American town, continues in this film, which hinges on the historical facts of slavery and segregation. In *Manderlay*, the character Grace appears at a cotton plantation where the black workers are still treated as slaves, 70 years after their legal emancipation. Full of idealism, she steps in to help them take control of their own destinies, teaching them to vote on community decisions. Grace could easily resemble an idealist from the young Turkish Republic, a Young Turk, or a Turkish 'Kemalist' character from the first half of the 20th century, who goes as a 'saviour' to a underdeveloped traditional, poor village to enlighten the illiterate villagers and revolutionise their lives.

Confidently carrying the knowledge of freedom in her hands, Grace does not feel the need to listen to other opinions. She feels her first duty is to teach the residents of the farm that they have a right to speak for themselves. Even while she facilitates group meetings and encourages the collective voice, Grace continues to believe she is the only source of information about a free world and privileges of assembly, into which she has to initiate these unlucky, disenfranchised, uncivilised 'other' elements. This scene of training the supposedly less human to be sufficiently human can be seen in the history of many different modernisation movements all over the world, but most violently and relentlessly in colonialist confrontations.

The most disturbing aspect of the political stance exposed in *Manderlay* is the sequence of documentary photographs at the end of the movie, condemning US imperialism as well as warlords, etc. Without these direct addresses to US international crimes, the film can be read as not just a scathing attack on US foreign policy or its militarist inventions,³ as but a general critique of idealism. If we 'subtract' these references to the US, the director's critique becomes applicable to certain kinds of ideologies found everywhere, and imposed for given historical periods.

*In a way, then, she does turn around an axis; she continually returns to the masculine subject who calls her, she does not abandon him, she is there when he calls. He may withhold acknowledgement and refuse to see her sacrifice ; the sacrifice of her own flesh.*⁴

Austrian director Michael Haneke's 2005 film *Caché* (Hidden) depicts the colonialist notion of dialogue in a different manner. *Caché* is set in a totally postcolonial, post-industrial environment. The main protagonist George, a well-known Parisian TV anchor, receives menacing, mysterious 'surveillance videos' that show scenes from his private and family life. This plot element is combined with political allegory: *Caché* is partly an evocation of France's "repressed memory of *la nuit noire*"⁵, the night of 17 October 1961, when hundreds of Algerian demonstrators in Paris were beaten, and many killed, by the police.

Caché exploits the trope of the panopticon, of the Orwellian "big brother" gaze. George ; a TV anchor, someone whose image is celebrated and always seen by many people ; feels tense when he is personally watched, as opposed to being viewed by the public while he does his professional work. The intervention of the surveillance camera leaves him no room to hide. The hidden cave, the hidden corner, is under camera control.

In this film, the French are in the position of controlling and watching ; they are fated to a sterile life that sees everyone through a well-organised social system symbolised by a surveillance camera. Haneke, working on the power of the scopic drive and the politics of viewing, first turns his gaze upon an ignored national crime of 1961: a sin of civilisation, a sin of racist exclusion, which has left its trace but has receded from public memory.

George is no visionary teacher of the postcolonial era. He doesn't care to 'enlighten' Algerians, or 'free' oppressed Algerian women, or 'civilise' immigrants, or 'organise' a free society, as Grace attempts to do with the slaves in *Manderlay*. Freedom is not a relevant issue. As a director, Haneke is not a critic of idealism in the von Trier manner. George is only interested in distancing himself from the 'other', here in the form of the character Majid ; in throwing him, as he says, "into the Seine of his own life", just as the bodies of Majid's parents were dumped into the river by the police during the 1961 violence.

Haneke, who has always been very critical of Western middle-class values and lifestyles, successfully shows how sterile bourgeois social relations extend their disgust for touch into all dimensions of social life, and paradoxically, how this sterile environment itself makes us sick. This is symbolically rendered through the metaphor of sleep in the film. Sleeping in a sterile environment is the most hygienic of all possible situations.

Throughout the film, George is forced to enter the realm with which he does not want to have any kind of direct contact or contiguity. The surveillance camera's watching eye takes him into the 'other' neighbourhood, the 'other' house of Majid, the 'other' position of having to talk with Majid in the latter's flat. A politically reversed 'grand tour' for the rulers, where the 'education' for the 'nobleman' of our times is enforced contact with the physical domain of that which is 'other', devalued and despised. In George's case, he decides what is to be forgotten, what is to be remembered, what is to stay hidden and what is to be projected 'on screen'.

When Majid tries to talk with George using different tactics of communication, he is always calm, and constantly invites a dialogue. But this never takes place because George never listens, he is always accusing or threatening or hiding. Evidently no dialogue. Nothing reciprocal. He only speaks, does not hear. At the end, we see Majid dying under this suffocating pressure of being deflected, denied, evaded, neglected, erased as an entity. And interestingly, Haneke makes us think of suicide bombers as well. The only exit Majid can visualise involves killing himself, and thus forcing George to at least briefly acknowledge 'other' presence.

Unlike von Trier, who clearly retains the US as the target of his critique, Haneke does not want to confine his critique into the French situation ; the proximal sin of a specific local wound in 1961, or the distant sin of a suppurating colonial memory. Instead, he leaves it open so that it may diffuse into other geographies, other culpabilities^a

A potent earlier example of these inversions is Jean-Pierre Gorin and Jean-Luc Godard's 1972 film *Tout va Bien* (Everything's Fine), which shows a strike at a sausage factory, during which the manager is held hostage within the factory by the workers. In one scene, we see manager in a desperate search for a toilet. This frantic activity is his reversed 'grand

tour' ; the workers ensure that all the toilets are occupied, and the manager finds himself in a state of increasing distress. Like George in *Caché*, he is forced into unavoidable, unwanted close contact with the 'other'; and his only solution to the problem of not finding a toilet is to finally break a window of the very property he is responsible for, and urinate through it.

Where *Tout va Bien* is a satiric rendering of the theme of violent racial/social 'othering', *Caché* is tragic; we are shown George witnessing Majid cutting his own throat. These images are interventions in unjust and traumatic historical contexts; they are climactic screams, naked protests that express profound despair at what is experienced, and also at the inability to visualise possible solutions to the root of such despair. For some viewers, Haneke may even be ominously "announcing a coming catastrophe"⁷.

*Irigaray contends that in appropriating all creative power to himself, Dionysus replicates the illusion of masculine self-sufficiency. Although Dionysus identifies with sensual becoming, he loses the passage between self and other truly feminine becoming.*⁸

The Austria-based artist collective WochenKlausur⁹ sees their activity as not just confined to the exploration of aesthetic form, but also as a dynamic means to evolve specific interventions applicable to contemporary social issues. One of the group's projects in 1994 aimed at creating a shelter in Zurich where drug-addicted women earning their money through prostitution could sleep, relax and seek counselling. Women working the strip had nowhere to sleep during the day, as Zurich's shelters were only open at night. WochenKlausur decided to establish a women-only facility in which sex workers could rest during the day.

The collective arranged a kind of alternative, inverse 'grand tour' through bringing politicians, journalists and other citizens together with these sex workers in a boat on Lake Zurich, thus setting up the space and opportunity for direct dialogue between 'respectable' folk and those stigmatised by Swiss society. The effort was not to shock or sensationalise, lament or castigate, but to actually reach a 'solution' to the problem of the women having no shelter when they most needed it. Of course, the very concept of 'solution' here is controversial. Nevertheless, WochenKlausur successfully created an environment for interpersonal engagement and dialogue.

As they noted, during the boat's daily trips, groups of experts were able to exchange information and discuss their opinions on the state's drug policy without having to deal with the pressures of fulfilling a public role. There were about 60 participants: the secretaries of all the Swiss political parties, Zurich city counsellors, prosecuting attorneys, newspaper editors, experts from the fields of prevention, therapy, and medically controlled narcotic distribution, police directors, and the drug users themselves.¹⁰

In such boat-laboratories, we see efforts to experiment with dialogue between people who are normally imagined to have stances in opposition to each other, or who are subject to increasing polarisation by conditioned media discourse and the thrust of cultural

hegemonies. People who are normally inhabit separate social segments, sitting in separate rooms, including those of their 'otherness', are able to cross some socio-political boundaries through the strategies of WochenKlausur and meet in a defined space for interaction ; actually a boat travelling on Lake Zurich. On the other hand, in cases such as Turkey's EU bid or the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy, where open dialogue is an urgent social and political necessity, we are generally forced to inhabit our bounded opinions, where in time we become less able to see alternative, in-between positions and paths. We remain stuck in claustrophobic rooms, whereas the critical need is that we walk through walls, compelled by 'other' presence as well as of our own exploratory volition ; as in Marcel Aymé's exquisite and disturbing short story *Le Passe-Muraille* (The Man Who Could Walk through Walls, 1943).

This fantastic text, one of Aymé's most important literary contributions, was written while France was under Nazi occupation. The story is about Dutilleul, a timid clerk in the revenue office who discovers he can pass through walls with perfect ease. Using this remarkable gift, he totally changes his predictable life; first he becomes a very famous burglar, and then steals the heart of young blonde who has a brutal and jealous husband. But misfortune strikes after he takes pills the doctor gave him; one day when he was on his way to his new lover he gets stuck within a garden wall, and stays immobilised there. Aymé declares, "He is there to this very day, imprisoned in the stone" (Jean Marais' sculpture of the pinioned, paralysed 'walker' can be seen today in Montmartre, Paris).

Aymé's stories were themselves walking through walls, for they had to pass through Nazi censors, and were even published in collaborationist periodicals such as *Je suis partout*. "The texts themselves became a *passe-muraille* and Marcel Aymé a *passeur*: not only for the texts, but for his readers whom he conjurally ushered into a space of phosphorescence"¹¹.

WochenKlausur's interventions can also be seen as various acts of walking through walls. This group too is interested in conversations immobilised inside the walls of the 'other'. Maybe we also have to work out strategies and ways of freely walking *within* walls, not only *through* walls^a

In the final episodes of Michael Haneke's *Caché*, we see George forcing himself into an artificial sleep. He comes home in the daytime to his hidden bedroom, closes the curtains, takes pills and gets into bed. An uninterrupted amnesic circuit, blissfully closed, is his aim ; the function of a hegemonic forgetting mechanism. Sleeping that very moment instead of living it. The paradoxical freedom that comes from walling the self in sleep, which allows one to walk through dream after dream.

On the other hand, we have the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Persecuted during the reign of the Roman emperor Decius (around 250), seven young men were accused of being Christians. They were granted some time to recant their faith; they gave their worldly goods to the poor and retired to a mountain to pray. There they fell asleep. Furious at being defied, the emperor ordered the mouth of the cave to be sealed.

Decades passed. After a certain time, during the reign of Theodosius (379-395), the

landowner decided to use the cave as a cattle pen. He opened up the sealed mouth of the cave and found the sleepers inside. They woke, convinced that they had been asleep for only one day.

Maybe because Ephesus is near modern Selçuk in Turkey, or maybe because the miracle of the Seven Sleepers is also cited in the Quran (Surah 18, verses 9-26), in Anatolia you can hear many versions of the legend, and the location of the cave is different in each one. And in some of these local imaginings of the miracle, the Seven Sleepers awoken in a cave other than the one they had gone to sleep in! Their sleeping is in itself a powerful act of resistance to oppression, whereas George's choice to take pills and go to sleep in *Caché* was an index of surrender.

The Seven Sleepers are walking through the walls of caves and through time. And they might well form a network underground, linking each node of 'resistance' ^a

Translated from the Turkish by Erden Kosova

NOTES

1. Tamsin Lorraine. *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Cornell University Press, 1999, Ithaca/London), pp. 56-57.
2. *Ibid*, p. 63.
3. In a November 2005 interview conducted by Katja Nicodemus for the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, Lars von Trier said it is quite clear his film can be read as an allegory of President Bush's efforts to impose democracy in Iraq. "The parallels to Iraq are just begging to be drawn. I'm convinced that in the Iraq of Saddam Hussain there were morals of a sort. Of course, these morals killed a lot of people or put them in prison. But you can't simply do away with the old rules, introduce new ones and believe that it's all going to work. Moral traditions have to develop from within society. And I still find it unbelievable that we think that the way we organise our societies is the only right way^a That's why I was not remotely surprised by what happened in New Orleans. It was as if the storm [Hurricane Katrina] had to come along to open the Americans' eyes. To show them the conditions in which the black population lives".
For interview transcript, see <http://www.signandsight.com/features/465.html>
4. Tamsin Lorraine, op. cit., p. 63.
5. The reference is to a massacre in Paris on 17 October 1961, during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62). Under orders from the police prefect Maurice Papon (later convicted for his collaboration during Vichy), the French police attacked an unarmed demonstration of 30,000 Algerians. Some were thrown by the police in the Seine river and drowned, while others died later in the courtyard of the Paris police headquarters. Bertrand Delanoë, the current mayor of Paris (and member of the Socialist Party, PS), has put a plaque in remembrance of the massacre, on the Saint-Michel Bridge on 17 October 2001. How many demonstrators were killed is still unclear, but estimates range from 70 to 200 people. In the absence of official estimates, the street plaque stated: "In the memory of the many Algerians killed during the bloody repression of the pacific demonstration of October 17, 1961". In 1961, the police prefecture only talked about "2 persons shot dead". In 1998, the state acknowledged that the massacre had occurred and that 40 people had died. In 1997, Minister of Culture Catherine Trautmann (PS) allowed limited access

to historian David Assouline to consult part of the police documents (which were supposed to be classified until 2012). With only limited access, he found a list of 70 persons killed, while the texts confirmed Einaudi's comments that the magistrates seized by families of victims had systematically acquitted the policemen. According to *Le Monde* in 1997, which quoted the director of the Paris Archives, the register would list 90 persons on the second half of October. The massacre was not officially confirmed until 1999. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_massacre_of_1961

See also http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1604970.stm

6. In a January 2006 interview conducted by Dominik Kamalzadeh for the German daily newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*, Michael Haneke remarks: "How do you behave when confronted with something that you should actually admit responsibility for? These are the sort of strategies that interest me: talking yourself out of guilt. It's like this ; we all believe we're so fantastically liberal. None of us want to see immigration laws tightened. Yet when someone comes to me and asks if I could take in a foreign family, then I say, well, not really. Charity begins at home with the door firmly shut. Most people are as cowardly and comfortable as I am^a I'm always amazed when people talk about problems like this as if they were something new. I was amazed when everybody started saying that the world was different after September 11. People with views like this must be incredibly naïve. To my eyes, the world looked remarkably similar before. It's the same with the riots. What this is really about is the primal legacy of colonialism and the nations involved labouring with the consequences. And there is no one solution to this^a There's such a thing as a sort of emotional memory for evil deeds. When a Proustian *madeleine* appears by coincidence, then it all re-emerges".
For interview transcript, see <http://www.signandsight.com/features/577.html>
7. As Peter Bradshaw wrote in the *Guardian*, 27 January 2006: "^a*Hidden* is partly a parable for France's repressed memory of *la nuit noire*, the night of 17 October 1961, when hundreds of Algerian demonstrators in Paris were beaten and killed by the police. As such, it is a cousin to events just 11 years later, dramatised by Steven Spielberg in *Munich*, but utterly without Spielberg's need to find resolution and common ground. *Hidden* is incomparably darker and harder. It is about the prosperous West's fear and hatred of the Muslim world and those angry pauperised masses once under our colonial control, and over whose heads a new imperium is being negotiated in the Middle East and beyond. Haneke is often described as the 'conscience' of European cinema: but he is more a Cassandra, announcing a coming catastrophe and fervently imagining its provocation, acting out the cataclysm's tinder-spark. Haneke's vision is as cold and unforgiving as the surface of Pluto^a"
8. Tamsin Lorraine, op. cit, p. 56.
9. Since 1993, WochenKlausur has been carrying out social interventionist projects at the invitation of art institutions. The name roughly translates as "weeks of closure", *Klausur* sharing the root of the English words "enclosure", "seclusion" and "cloister". The group's projects take place within a few weeks in the focused atmosphere of a closed-session working situation. A strictly limited timeframe gives rise to an unusual concentration of the participants' energies, allowing the interventions to be realised quickly.
10. For a detailed account, see <http://www.wochenklausur.at>.
11. Jonathan Horn. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama, 1997. For Marcel Aymé's story in English (The Man Who Could Walk through Walls, transl. Karen Reshkin), see <http://www.stresscafe.com/translations/pm-final.pdf>

This Morning, This Evening: Beirut, 15 July 2006

WALID RAAD

This Morning^a

Yet another day of bombing all over the place. In the mountains here, we were subject to about three different bombing runs: the first, to continue destroying the road from Beirut to Damascus; another to destroy the cell phone antennas; and another to again hit the Beirut-to-Damascus road. Just a few minutes ago, the house was shaking again, and I can only assume the Israelis are pounding the same area. The safe areas are much further to the north, the northeastern enclave, an area traditionally Christian.

Listening to Nasrallah's¹ speech tonight was not reassuring one bit. After pleading with the Lebanese to stand firm, and after denouncing Arab governments for leaving Lebanon to pay the price for Israeli aggression, he asked us all to look at the sea and watch the Israeli gunboat that had been pounding the coast and hills all day. He said that it was about to be hit by a HizbAllah missile. He promised that it will burn, that it will sink, that its sailors will die. It made me sick to my stomach, almost as much as it makes me sick to hear Olmert's, Bush's, the Saudi and the Palestinian position about this. Nasrallah also called for an open war against Israel, and said that he will hit Haifa, and what is behind Haifa, and behind and behind Haifa. What this means remains unclear.

But clearly, it is worrying. Within minutes of the speech, parts of West Beirut were celebrating. The city is about to be reduced to rubble, and fireworks are being fired in the air. Incredible. Al-Jazeera and most local networks pointed their lenses towards the sea to look for a missile launch, which came but was not visible. This is just not good. This is just about to get worse. I don't know what to think anymore.

Pundits are speculating, making noise: Did HizbAllah need to drag Lebanon into this mess at this time? How can HizbAllah unilaterally decide to launch a war, to destroy the country? Others are convinced that Israel is simply intent on enforcing Resolution 1559, namely to disarm HizbAllah by force. HizbAllah is asking everyone to stand firm, and to be patient. This has happened before, and we have triumphed. We will triumph again, they say.

Whatever all this leads to, one thing is certain ; the scale of the destruction is enormous. People are dying in the south and elsewhere. Too many. The bombing has moved to the north, and in the past hour positions inside Syria were hit. Iran has said that were Syria to be hit, Iran will respond. A regional war? What s going on?

Embassies here are starting to evacuate their citizens. The French, the Canadians, the Germans and the Americans just announced the same. I cannot imagine the violence going on for months, despite what some officials up high are stating. I assume that the regional ploy is to disarm HizbAllah. This will only happen if Syria and Iran get something in return. What is the US willing to grant them? Also, they have to find a way out for HizbAllah. Which means that HizbAllah s position within the Lebanese government will have to be negotiated. They may disarm HizbAllah, but have to give them a way out as well. After all, HizbAllah represents 1 million people here. Israel and the US cannot kill them all.

Rumours aplenty, every ten minutes. The news ; all of it, Arab and international ; makes me sick. We are stuck with a false choice: support HizbAllah, or be thought of as an Israeli agent. That is, at least, what HizbAllah and their Syrian allies are saying. The Christian right s position is equally naïve. They want to assume that HizbAllah will just go away. They are wishing it, at least. That won t happen, no matter what.

Everyone is miscalculating, it seems ; HizbAllah, the Americans, the Israelis, the Saudis, the Palestinians, the French, the Russians, the Chinese. You name it. The effects on the ground will remain, once this crisis is resolved. It has already generated enough antagonism to last us another decade.

We are trying to think of what to do. To leave, and be stuck in the US, glued to the TV, trying to figure out what is happening ; that will be maddening.

This will clearly get worse before it gets better, and we have not seen the worst yet. Now, all parties are slowly revealing their cards.

Best,
w.

This Evening^a

We still have the landline. Cell phones are working from time to time. Electricity is being rationed. We are getting it for around eight hours a day. Generators provide the rest, at this point. It is a situation we are used to, one that is decent ; even very good, compared to what other areas of the country are living through at the moment.

More idiots on Lebanese TV speculating some more about Israeli and HizbAllah intentions. More shelling in the southern suburbs. More massacres in the south. More

missiles to northern Israel. More fireworks celebrating HizbAllah's resistance.

Do we need to say this again and again and again: There is no such thing as targeted/surgical shelling in a city with hundreds of thousands of homes, built cheek to cheek. Israel shelled the house of Hassan Nasrallah. I suppose they thought he would be home enjoying his afternoon tea at the time. They took out the lighthouse that stood on the Corniche, lest it send out distress signals that the world will not see. A family leaving, fleeing its village in the south, was pulverised; surely the smoke from the shelling blinded the scope of the gunner, preventing him/her from seeing that the small people in the car were not extremely short HizbAllah fighters. Should we tally numbers? Do we need to open more morgue doors to reveal yet another mangled body, yet another weeping parent, yet another angry relative denouncing this or that government? This or that policy?

Amr Moussa² stated tonight, after the spineless meeting of Arab ministers, that it is clear now that the US has handed Israel a free hand in solving the Mid-East crisis, as it sees fit; whether it decides unilaterally to withdraw from Gaza, from the West Bank, whether it refrains from destroying Gaza again, from destroying Beirut, etc. I wonder why it took them so long to figure this out. Is the oil in the Gulf still a weapon in their hands? Surely not, as we are reminded time and time again. What is the price of oil again? How much of Europe's oil is supplied by the Saudis and the Kuwaitis? How much of US oil is supplied by the Middle East? Did we reach 78 USD a barrel yet? Maybe the Saudis will use some of the surplus to rebuild the country again. What's a billion dollars when the price of oil reaches 78 USD a barrel? Someone knows this somewhere, and is most likely depending on it.

Israeli ceasefire conditions are announced, as I write this:

- ; Retreat of HizbAllah fighters to behind the Litani river in the south
- ; Handover of all HizbAllah missiles to the Lebanese Army
- ; Deployment of the Lebanese Army in the south

On this end, I am tired, and am not able to think straight anymore.
Hoping for a quiet night, and to wake up with a ceasefire declared.

Best,
w.

PS: To hear myself speculating on military and political matters makes me laugh, as much as it makes me laugh to listen to Jordanian, Palestinian and other Arab leaders. I am thinking of Jalal Toufic³ when he writes: "All I ask of this world to which I have already given three books is that it become less laughable, so that I would be able to laugh again without dying of it. And that it does so before my sombreness becomes second nature. This has made me sombre not only through all the barbarisms and genocides it has perpetuated, but also through being so laughable. Even in this period of utmost sadness for an Arab in general, and an Iraqi and Lebanese in specific, I fear dying of laughter more than of

melancholic suicide, and thus I am more prone to relinquish my guard when it comes to being sad than to laughing at laughable phenomena^a

NOTES

1. Hassan Nasrallah is the leader of HizbAllah, a Shia militia in Lebanon (founded in 1982 to fight the Israeli defence forces that occupied southern Lebanon till 2000). It is backed by Iran and Syria.
2. Amr Moussa, a former Egyptian foreign minister and diplomat, is the current Secretary General of the League of Arab States.
3. Jalal Toufic is a writer, film theorist and video artist at present living in Lebanon.

Who Didn't Start the Fire...? Reflections on Bombs over a Cup of Coffee

SIMRAN CHADHA

"Naadro... Naadro yakhani" was the helpful suggestion that met my touristy queries regarding a vegetarian meal, in the famed land of *rishta* and *goshtaba* (traditional Kashmiri meat preparations). Having ventured into the eye of the storm, thanks to a gesture of unexpected bonhomie from the government of India towards Delhi University lecturers, the rage within to know Kashmir just had to be settled ; food, *chinars*, militant separatism ; I had to do it all. Now, *naadro*, in the Kashmiri *waazawan* (culinary etiquette), as I soon learnt, is the local *beau mot* for good old *kamal kakri* (lotus root); and as Delhi certainly had more than its fair share of *kakri* ; call it *nadroo* if you please ; this is nothing new, thought I, at least nothing Kashmiri. However, the capital shall never compete with the Valley, and so our *kakri* may never dream of aspiring to the status of a *nadroo* nurtured and ripened in the environs of the Dal lake and its brooding *chaar chinar* (a tiny island in the Dal with four *chinar* trees).

For as long as anyone can remember, Srinagar has been under violent siege ; while demanding autonomy, demanding freedom, demanding a reprisal of the Simla Accord.¹ But then, so had Punjab, so are the Sri Lankan Tamils, and Nepal is under curfew even as I write this; Tibet has been claimed by China, Pakistan has an M9 missile trained at New Delhi; even as peace talks go on, freedom of expression is under siege ; one cartoonist has been jailed for three years. And yet, our political fable does not begin with Once upon a time there were nation states^af

The singer Billy Joel builds on the disconcerting continuum of violence:

*We didn't start the fire
 It was always burning
 Since the world's been turning
 We didn't start the fire
 No we didn't light it
 But we tried to fight it^a*

Newspaper headlines have screamed of the violence inherent in the public domain almost every single day, making us a generation habituated to violence, almost like a category ; naturalised citizens of violence. Contemporaneously speaking, even when it translates to more than a newspaper headline read over a cup of decaffeinated Starbucks coffee ; such as the pre-Diwali bomb blasts in Delhi's Sarojini Nagar in 2005 ; it is still a part of a scheme of things that one can but witness. One facet of me comforts a student, her father blown up by a bomb concealed in a radio. My words sound facile to my ears^a I know that the wound will fester when even she believes it is healed and shrunk to a scar. Such is the nature of the inner turbulence ; schizoid personalities^a fragmented, frayed^a a Wailing Wall within each one of us. We could be the children of the Thalidomide generation of Joel's song ; our appendages invisible but constantly growing.

The androgynous prophet of Greek mythology, Tiresias,³ provides no comfort; the cultural distances are far too vast, and the only comfort I receive is the awareness of a cultural colonisation. Academics shelves record terrorism through realistic historical and anthropological details. The poetic is scarce.

So here I am, learning all about *nadroos*, and hearing Joel chant:

*Little Rock, Pasternak, Mickey Mantle, Kerouac
 Sputnik, Chou En-Lai, Bridge on the river Kwai*

*Lebanon, Charles de Gaulle, California baseball
 Starweather, homicide, children of Thalidomide*

^a *JFK blown away, what else do I have to say*

In Srinagar, the questions loomed large ; in the Pari Mahal, in the shouts of the *shikara* (houseboat) owners, luring customers for a ride, with lower-than-ever prices. I wondered what I was looking for^a what answers was I seeking^a why did I expect to see in Kashmir the angst of a society transformed by the daily trauma of political violence, emotive violence, ideological and nationalistic violence? And why did my eyes stare at the sign Home for Children of Disappeared Parents?

At the 17th-century shrine of Hazratbal, the turbulence caused by the relic ; *Moi-e Muqqadas* (the sacred hair of the Prophet Muhammad) ; once lost/stolen and wrecking

vengeance on the culprit ; is a story long receded into the mists of myth. Now, new folklore reigns. A woman, about 50 years old, beat her chest and sobbed out her pain, clutching the *jaffery* (marble latticework) demarcating the women's area from the men's, grieving for^a father, brother, husband, son^a or was this a matter of ritualistic mourning? The soldier guarding the relic offered her a glass of water. A gestural recognition of the common humanity that bonded them. And why did my head bow in shame, as if I was responsible for what was happening (bureaucracy in my family is limited to the Foreign Service; and politicians there are none)?

On the way to Gulmarg, a line of soldiers guards the highway. Yet, one often sees them converse freely and cheerfully with the local population ; the schoolboy returning home, the lad wheeling a punctured bicycle ; and yet even then, in the flash of a second, the mask of the oppressor falls into place, if, for instance, a local bus happens to block the way of the speeding Ambassador car with the flashing red light. The passengers sit stricken-faced. And voices, men, women and children together, intoned softly: *Allah ho, Allah ho; Jal tu, Jalal tu, aiye baalaa sa taal tu*^a (a prayer appealing to Allah for mercy when confronted with unwarranted terror; in this case, the symbol of state authority).

Strange, this existence of ours ; we call it postmodern, and try and understand it through theories of fragmented chaos.

^a*We didn't start the fire*^a

That sign again, Home for Children of Disappeared Parents^f. The words resonated with so much more. But then, disappearances were not just political. It was not just the state that was responsible for the murders. It was a war that was being run by arms dealers and drug traffickers. How naïve one can be sometimes, living in an insulated cosmopolitan shell. I wondered: when did the image of the terrorist shift, ever so smoothly, from the burly, turbaned Jat-Sikhs to the spectral figure of the *jihadi* with red-and-white chequered scarf?

Three months down the line, back home safe in Delhi, savouring the Starbucks coffee that a friend returning home after a successful stint at New York University had generously brought along, the one singularly pervasive impression of Kashmir is of a silence, intermittently broken by cries of Take my *shikara*^a Rs 200 only^a full one-hour ride^a ok, one-and-a-half^a ^f

Silent city. Death had taken so many^f, they said. Most of them have migrated for the winter, life here is harsh in winter, you know^a ^f I nodded in agreement. It's by and large peaceful^f, said the manager at the Palace Hotel, adding, Well, if you happen to be at the wrong place^a there was a blast in Lal Chowk, recently^a ^f He continues, ^aBut then who expected the Delhi blasts, in Sarojini Nagar of all places?^f I nod in agreement once again. It's the eye of the storm. They're nice to you because you are tourists, they will treat you like God ; you're their last chance to make money before the winter, when everything goes dead^f.

*Birth control, Ho Chi Minh, Richard Nixon back again
Moonshot, Woodstock, Watergate, punk rock*

*Begin, Reagan, Palestine, terror on the airline
Ayatollah s in Iran, Russians in Afghanistan*

Meanwhile, images of the devastation of the earthquake in the Kargil region are slowly trickling in. The tremors were felt in Delhi. A team of experts has ventured into the troubled areas ; troubled now by natural turbulence. It s sad times for us Kashmiris^f, intones the *shikara* owner. I try to speak about the bus service between Amritsar and Lahore, wondering whether it will reverse the violently-inscribed boundary lines of Partition. I know nothing of Pakistan^f, he insists, firmly declaring, I am an Indian^f. Indian-Kashmiri/ Indian Punjabi/ South Indian/ Indian-Bengali; the term comes suspiciously close the feminist adage as many women, as many feminisms .

A friend returned from SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies); she was full of the experience of the London blasts. Right next to SOAS, you know^a^f I look for signs of a society transformed by its violence: centrifugal, centripetal. If power is productive of resistance, is violence productive of creativity? The raped, metamorphosed Philomela⁴ as nightingale sings her pain, her humiliation, her trauma.

In *Forget Kathmandu*, recording the Maoist insurgency in Nepal, the author Manjushree Thapa writes, When you live in the thick of events, it is easier to experience than understand them^f. Trekking in the Himalayas, a friend visited the Maoist-hit area of Jiri. He has an interesting story to tell ; after allowing him the customary space/rest that is accorded to all travellers from the plains, the villagers barraged him with questions regarding life in Delhi ; the murderous city. The village headman, appalled by the news coverage regarding the Delhi blasts, wondered how anyone^a just anyone, could live in a city like Delhi?

*We didn t start the fire
But when we are gone
Will it still burn on and on and on^a*

NOTES

1. The Simla Accord, also known as the Simla Pact or the Simla Agreement, was signed in Simla on 2 July 1972 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then President of Pakistan, and Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India. It bound the two countries to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations^f. It also cemented the militarised Line of Control between Indian Kashmir and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as something close to a permanent border. The Simla Accord has been the basis of all subsequent bilateral talks between India and Pakistan, though it has not prevented the frequently tense relationship between the two countries from deteriorating to the point of armed conflict, most recently in the 1990 Kargil war in Kashmir. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simla_Accord

2. *We Didn't Start the Fire* is a song about blame and about victims. Joel wanted to tell society's younger generation that it was good to want to find solutions to these urgent social and political problems; but no one, especially those who caused the problems, could expect that they would all be solved in one day^a
www.billyjoel.com/index.html
3. In Greek mythology, Tiresias is the blind prophet of Thebes who revealed to Oedipus that Oedipus had unknowingly murdered his own father and married his mother. In one version of the Tiresias myth, Tiresias was a priest of Zeus. As a young man he encountered two snakes mating, and hit the female with his staff. He was then transformed into a woman. In this form, Tiresias became a priestess of Hera, married and had children. After living seven years as a woman, Tiresias again encountered mating snakes. He made sure to strike the male with his staff this time, and thus became a man once more.
<http://www.answers.com/topic/tiresias>
4. Philomela and Procne were the daughters of King Pandion of Athens. Procne was married to King Tereus of Thrace, and had a son by him, Itys. Tereus conceived an illicit passion for Philomela and contrived to get her sent to Thrace. He raped her, and then cut her tongue out and imprisoned her so that she could tell no one of his crime. However, Philomela wove the facts of the event into a tapestry and sent it to Procne. In order to get revenge, Procne killed Itys, cooked him and served him to Tereus. The king ate his own son for dinner. When Tereus discovered this, he pursued the two sisters, trying to kill them. Before the chase could end, the gods on Olympus changed all three into birds; Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a swallow, and Philomela into a nightingale.
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/philomela.html>

A Kashmiri's 'Encounter' with Delhi

BISMILLAH GILANI

It was the summer of 1996. My brother, Syed Abdul Rehman Gilani, had come to Kashmir from Delhi to spend his vacation at home. One day, out of the blue, he announced that he was going back. He said that he would have to cut short his vacation as he had to attend to some pending research for his M.Phil. dissertation.

For some time I had been thinking of doing a computer course, and my brother suggested that Delhi would be a good place for this. On impulse, I decided to accompany him.

On 16 June 1996, we set off in a taxi for Jammu. By dusk we had reached. This was my first visit to Jammu, the city of temples, after the birth of militancy in the state of Jammu & Kashmir in 1989. Given the hustle and bustle of this city brimming with life, it was hard to believe that it had anything even remotely to do with ravaged Kashmir. The armed conflict in the Kashmir Valley seemed to have turned into a blessing in disguise for this part of the state. Jammu had really made impressive strides, especially because of the largesse of development funds that had been diverted to it. Suddenly, the grudge that most Kashmiris held against the Jammu-ites became understandable to me. This was an entirely different world. Srinagar and Jammu, the twin capitals of the same state, were realities that were poles apart. A trip from Srinagar to Jammu seemed like a journey from a prison to the free world outside.

We went straight to the railway station. Here we met another Kashmiri traveller who was also going to Delhi. We checked our reservations and boarded the train. After setting our luggage in place, we sat chatting with our fellow Kashmiri for a while. He was a Delhi-based businessman dealing in Kashmiri handicrafts. When the train started rolling out of the station, I went and lay down on my berth. My brother stayed sitting, talking to our newfound friend.

I couldn't sleep. I got off the berth and started pacing up and down the compartment.

There were very few passengers on board. Everyone was asleep, apart from two men who were sitting in the corner seat enjoying a drink together. I sat down in the window seat facing them. One of them looked at me, smiling, as if he was saying, I hope you don't mind^f. I smiled back at him. After some time he offered me a drink, which I politely refused. A few minutes later he again looked at me and smiled. I managed to force another smile and then turned to look at the landscape through the window. After about ten minutes, he leaned towards me with folded hands, smiled and then proceeded to touch my feet. He was very drunk, and not in a condition to listen to anything, so I kept quiet. As he bent to touch my feet again, I got up and scolded him: Why do you people drink if you cannot control yourselves?^f

Heedless of what I was saying, he persisted in his effort to touch my feet. *Maibaap*, you are my mother, my father; do what you have to, but don't do it here. I have my family travelling with me, my little children. Please do not do it here^f. I had no clue of what was on his mind. I tried to move to another seat but he held on to my leg, making it impossible for me to move. I am not speaking nonsense, *maharaj* (sir), I am only making a humble request. I know you are going to put a bomb on the train. Do it by all means, but not in this compartment, please. Put it somewhere else, in the adjacent compartment if you wish. Have mercy on my children. Do not do it here, for God's sake!^f

This man was now giving me the jitters. I was in a real quandary about how to deal with the situation. Keeping a cool head seemed to be the only way of avoiding a confrontation. Very calmly, I tried to reassure him. Look, you have had a bit too much to drink, You need proper sleep to get sober. Let me help you to your berth^f. My efforts were in vain. My wife, my small children^{af} he kept wailing in the same vein.

Meanwhile, his companion also staggered into the fray. But unlike his obsequious friend, he was rather aggressive. Show me your identity card!^f he demanded, stretching out his hand as if I was bound to comply with this order. But before I could say anything, his friend took him away to the corner and whispered something into his ear, and somehow managed to make him sit down.

I am sorry for his foolishness^f, the scared man said again. He has gone crazy, but don't worry, I will make him understand. We are returning from our pilgrimage to Vaishno Devi in Jammu, we had gone for *darshan* (viewing) of the *Mata* (mother goddess). I have three small children. Look at them, they are asleep over there^f.

I had had enough. I said to them Look, I have nothing to do with you or your family, and let me make it clear that I am just a student. I am not carrying any bombs with me to blow you up. Now I would like to go to sleep, and I do not want to be disturbed any further^f.

I went back to my berth. Now the two were talking loudly amongst themselves, but I drifted into sleep, thinking that the trouble had passed. But it was not to be. After about half an hour, I was rudely woken up by the aggressive one of the two. Once again he demanded, Show me your identity card!^f It seemed that he was hell-bent on examining my identity card. Why should I show you my identity card? Who are you?^f I asked. His reply was loud, arrogant and immediate. I am a citizen of this country, and you are a terrorist^f.

My brother had woken up by then. He asked me what was going on, and I briefly told him what had happened. He went to talk to the two drunk passengers still lurking in their corner

seats. He told them off sternly and finally persuaded them to calm down and go to sleep.

Now it was the turn of our newfound Kashmiri friend to get his word in. Thank God they have fallen asleep. I thought that we were in serious trouble and was thinking of a way to get out of this compartment^f. He had been awake throughout the episode, but had chosen to stay silent. Suddenly he turned towards me in anger and said, But why must you advertise your Kashmiri self?^f I was really surprised, and asked, Do you think it was all my fault, then?^f Of course it was^f, he replied. We Kashmiris are not like others. We must be aware of our position and behave accordingly^f. But I was really taken aback by what came next. And this beard²^f he continued, pointing to my little more than a few-days-old stubble, I just cannot understand what is wrong with all you young Kashmiris. Why do you have to grow beards in spite of knowing all the problems it causes for all of us? The first thing you must do on reaching Delhi is to get rid of it. Otherwise you will end up making life difficult not only for yourself, but for all those who are around you. I can assure you that is was all because of your beard. That is what put us all into this extremely dangerous situation^f.

He went on in this vein for some time, narrating anecdotes about people he knew who got into extremely difficult situations^f just because they sported beards. I do not remember all his stories, because in the middle of his ranting I fell asleep.

This incident has left its mark on me. It has given me a deep insight on the meaning of being a Kashmiri Muslim. From that day on, I have never travelled by train between Jammu and Delhi. I prefer to take the bus instead, even though it is not as comfortable, but at least it does not disturb my peace.

When we finally got to Delhi, we took a three-wheeler to the campus. It was my first encounter with the heat of Delhi's summer. Even after the hellish experience of the journey, I was ill-prepared for the scorching heat. The seat was so hot that just sitting was a form of continuous torture. I was cursing the moment I thought of leaving Kashmir for Delhi on a whim.

We got off outside Mansarovar Hostel in Delhi University, near Mall Road, where my brother was then staying. Our Kashmiri fellow traveller and friend had to go further. Before we said goodbye, he reminded me again to shave my beard.

My brother took me straight to the dining hall. It was the first time that I had dined with so many unfamiliar faces. I was even hesitant to put food onto my plate. My brother noticed my unease and whispered, Don't worry, it's *halaal*; look, I am also eating the meat^f. He had thought that my hesitation was because of the meat, which I had not even noticed.

After lunch I followed my brother to the canteen where we had some tea. He introduced me to his friends and to his roommate. That evening we all went to Nizamuddin for dinner, and then we visited another friend in Mukherjee Nagar. For me, staying out this late at night was an entirely new experience. Sunset had marked the end of our social life, at least ever since militancy had begun in Kashmir. At times the streets were deserted even in the afternoon, and the only sound that we would hear outside was either that of a dog barking, or the heavy footfalls of armed security personnel and the passing roar of their patrol cars.

It all seemed strange. On the one hand I was happy to be away from a life characterised by restrictions, apprehensions and uncertainties; on the other hand, I could not help thinking

of the deprivations and humiliations that had become a routine part of our daily lives in Kashmir. It left me agonised. I felt homesick and went to a nearby phone booth to make a call home. My mother was shocked to know that we were out at this hour. I tried my best to put her anxieties to rest by saying that this was what was normal in Delhi, and that there was nothing to worry about. But son^f, she said, One should still be careful^f. She was as concerned as ever.

The next day, I woke up to the sound of a blast. I ran out of the room to find out what had happened. But to my surprise, I found that no one else was alarmed. I asked a student who happened to be standing at some distance what the noise was about. Must be fireworks, it is the marriage season^f, he said, looking at me with a surprised expression. It was evident that I was new to Delhi.

My brother took me to a computer institute in Shalimar Bagh. I chose to enrol in a one-year part-time course. The classes were to begin the very next day.

As I left the hostel for the computer institute the next day, I saw a police car parked near the bus stop outside the hostel. I fumbled in my pockets for an identity card. But this was an involuntary action. I had no identity card with me. I walked a little further till I drew close to the vehicle and stopped in my tracks. I stood still there for a while. A policeman sitting in the car leaned out and asked me, What happened?^f Nothing^f, I replied. He kept staring at me but didn't ask anything else. Meanwhile my bus arrived, and I boarded it.

I felt relieved to be away from the orbit of his glare, but the thought of this encounter would recur, over and over again. Perhaps I should not have stood there. I wonder what the policeman would be thinking about now. Thank God he did not ask me any questions. How would he have reacted if he came to know that I was Kashmiri? I could have been in trouble again. I should not behave so foolishly^f. During the past eight years in Kashmir, rarely had I been able to cross the path of a security forces vehicle without being questioned or thoroughly frisked.

I arrived at the institute only to discover that there was going to be no class that day, as the instructor had not come. So I decided to use this opportunity to get an identity card prepared for myself from the institute office. The receptionist asked me to leave a photograph and particulars. I wanted the card immediately, but she said that it would take at least a week. I tried very hard to persuade her of the urgency of the matter, but only ended up annoying her. How could she understand what meaning an identity card has for a Kashmiri?

In Kashmir, it was just unimaginable that anyone could step out of the four walls of a house without an identity card. There is a long list of people who have to pay a very heavy price for not possessing this indispensable document. There are some who have had to spend months altogether in Army detention centres, while others have had to face ruthless torture that has maimed them permanently. No wonder people in Kashmir are often seen making regular rounds of the concerned offices for weeks on end to get this document prepared, and are willing to spend large sums of money to bribe a clerk to obtain an identity card.

After a week's waiting, I finally got my identity card. Just a few days later I had occasion to put it to good use.

I was returning from the computer institute by bus. When it reached Kingsway Camp, it was stopped by a police picket for checking. A policeman got on and glanced at each passenger as he walked down the aisle. When he spotted me, he stared at me for a moment and then asked me to get off from the bus.

When I had disembarked, he asked me for some details about myself. I answered his questions and showed him my identity card. It was my card, I suppose, that satisfied him more than my answers; he let me go. But before leaving, I asked him why he chose to pick me out of all the passengers. I felt there was something suspicious about you^f, he answered, honestly. I asked him, Was that because of my beard, or because I look Kashmiri^f? He did not reply, but turned his attention towards another bus which had just arrived at the picket.

When I returned to the hostel, I reported what had happened to my brother. His reaction surprised me. As long as you roam around with a beard, such things are unavoidable^f, he said. But I was not convinced, and felt an instant aversion to the idea of sacrificing my beard.

I was the only Muslim and the lone Kashmiri among the students at the computer institute. We were 17 students: ten men, seven women. In the beginning I kept to myself. But I discovered soon that all of them had started calling me the angry young man^f. To get rid of this label, I started entering their conversations. But soon an incident occurred that once again put a distance between me and my fellow students.

There was a One-Day cricket series going on at that time. India had already lost a match to Pakistan. This defeat, which the students termed humiliating, was the topic of discussion on one of the days. Mohammad Azharuddin, the captain of the Indian cricket team, was under attack in our classroom. I thought this was justified, as he happened to be the skipper, and the fans of a losing team are within their rights to criticise the captain. But as the conversation unwound, I was shocked to realise that their criticism was pinned on to the fact that he happened to be Muslim. I could not tolerate this, and so expressed my disapproval by asking whether it was fair to assume that if the team wins under Tendulkar despite his bad individual performance, then the credit will still go to Tendulkar, and if the team loses under Azharuddin, despite his good individual performance, the fault will still be attributed to Azharuddin.

One of my classmates responded to what I expressed by saying, You don't know how bad these Muslims are, they always support Pakistan^f. I asked him, I am a Muslim, should I understand that this is your opinion about me as well^f? As I said these words, I could see the colour drain from their faces. No one spoke with me for a few days. Later, I came to know that they had somehow assumed all along that I was a Kashmiri Pandit.

I had a similar experience at the Mansarovar Hostel as well, where everyone knew me as Abdul Rehman Gilani's brother. But the bone of contention there would be Kashmir.

I found most of the students I had an opportunity to interact with terribly ill-informed about Kashmir. Whatever little they knew seemed to emanate from guide books, which depicted Kashmir as a perfect holiday destination, or from news reports, which, to say the least, distorted reality beyond recognition.

They would ask me about Kashmir, and I would tell them whatever I knew. But following this, most would never speak to me again; and should I chance to meet them, they would express their disapproval of my views, or perhaps of my very being, with a caustic remark or rude gesture casually thrown in my direction.

A student who once heard me talking with someone else warned me against openly discussing Kashmir. He told me about another Kashmiri student who had once lived in the hostel, who got beaten up very badly by the other hostellers for his outspoken views about Kashmir. While I decided to follow his advice, it was painful to see all these research scholars blinded by their own prejudices.

As the monsoon set in, I contracted a strange illness that sapped all my energy. I suffered a raging fever for over a month. It left me unable to do anything. Finally, following a doctor's advice, I returned to Kashmir.

I came back after a long while and rejoined the computer course. I also joined a Bachelor of Commerce course through correspondence, and enrolled in a certificate course in Arabic in Delhi University. All this kept me occupied for a while. Moreover, I now had a friend also staying in Delhi. His brother had just been transferred to a branch of the Jammu and Kashmir Bank in Azadpur, and my friend had come to stay with this brother. I was really happy to have him around. I would often go to see them at their rented flat in Adarsh Nagar. I always looked forward to their company.

Then it was August 1997. The golden jubilee of India's independence. The residents of the Mansarovar Hostel had planned a march through the university to celebrate the occasion.

I was alone in my brother's hostel room when a student came to inform me that the march was about to start and that I should join in. Then he went to the other rooms, to relay the same instruction. After a while he returned to tell me to hurry up. I told him that I would change my clothes and come in a while. He was at our door again in a few minutes, insistent that I participate. I went with him. I saw that half the participants held flaming torches in their hands. I was offered one. Under the circumstances, I felt it would be unwise to refuse. There was loud patriotic chanting of *Bharat Mata ki Jai* (Hail to Mother India)! The march began.

It reminded me of the crackdowns in Kashmir, when the Indian army would summon people from their homes, get them to line up and force them to chant *Jai Hind* (Victory to India)! while on the way to some large open space in the locality. This perhaps was the method by which they hoped to integrate the people of Kashmir into the mainstream of the Indian Republic.

I went to Adarsh Nagar the following day to meet my friend. I was sitting with him and his brother when a group of Kashmiris arrived and asked my friend's brother (the bank officer) to accompany them to the police station, to intercede with the police in order to secure the release of some of their friends who had been detained. They said that it was nothing really serious, that it had happened because it was usual for Kashmiris living in Delhi to be picked up and detained every year for a few days around 15 August (Independence Day) and 26 January (Republic Day).

I stayed in the Mansarovar Hostel with my brother until he got a job as a lecturer in

Zakir Husain (Evening) College. He then rented a flat in Pitampura and brought his family from Kashmir to stay with him. But we soon had to move from Pitampura as it proved too far a commute from the university where we both had to go daily. We moved this time to a second-floor rented flat in Mukherjee Nagar, which was a lot closer.

We were quite uneasy during the first few weeks in our new home, as the landlord and his family seemed a bit wary of us. They would enquire about the slightest sound they heard from us upstairs. But as time passed, our families started getting along. They told us that their neighbours had initially warned them about us. They had advised them against renting the place to Kashmiris, as it was well known (to them) that Kashmiris were Terrorists. Each time they heard a loud sound coming from upstairs, they would tell our landlord's family to check whether we were busy making bombs.

I got to know Mukesh, our landlord's nephew, quite well. He had recently opened a cyber café on the ground floor of our building. I would spend hours with him in the cyber café, surfing the internet, or chatting with him. Sometimes we would go for late-night walks to a nearby tea-stall, just before he closed the café, and have a cup. Mukesh's father was also friendly with me. All this changed after 11 September 2001 and the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. Something gave way. I began to feel a deep sense of unease and insecurity, both as a Muslim and as a Kashmiri. I found most of the Muslims and Kashmiris that I met in those days overwhelmed with apprehensions about the future. Everyone thought that things would get much worse for them in the coming days.

Then came the fateful day of 13 December 2001. It was the month of Ramzan, the day after Shab-e-Qadr. We were woken up by the landlord, who told us to switch on the television. In silence and utter disbelief, we all watched the attack on the Indian parliament. My sister-in-law was the first to voice our apprehensions when she said, *Ab kisi Kashmiri ki shaamat aayegi* (Now some Kashmiri is really going to get in trouble)^f. She did not realise that that it would be her own husband.

My brother was picked up on 14 December 2001 while he was on his way to the mosque on Mall Road for Friday prayers. Then the special cell of the Delhi Police came looking for us as well. I was detained along with two cousins. My brother was being tortured in a room nearby. One of the constables asked me, What do Kashmiri militants look like?^f I answered, What do you think they look like?^f One of the policemen guarding us said, We have heard that they have long hair, long nails and long beards, and they are so dangerous that they can even eat people alive^f. I laughed and said, Kashmiri militants look like you and me^f. I could see that they did not believe me.

A few days later they released me and my cousins, but continued to detain my brother. The police dropped us back to our Mukherjee Nagar flat. Our landlord's family was now visibly scared of us. Their children refused to play with my brother's children. That night I went out to make a long-distance call to Kashmir from the neighbouring phone booth. The owner refused to let me use the phone. I went to another booth; there too I was turned away. Then my sister-in-law went to a third one. The man who owned this one politely told her that it would create problems for him if any of us used his phone. After that we sent my

five-year-old nephew Aatif to another booth, thinking that at least a child would not arouse fear or suspicion. We were mistaken. Finally we had to go all the way to Kingsway Camp, a neighbourhood where no one knew us, to make a phone call.

I realised that from now on I would be identified as the brother of a terrorist, and so by analogy, as a terrorist myself. On one occasion a notary refused to notarise an affidavit I needed for admission to a university course, saying that I was a terrorist. Another notary finally did what needed doing, but only after I had paid him Rs 500 as compensation for the risk he said he would incur by notarising the affidavit of a terrorist.

It took two years and the overturning of a death sentence before my brother was acquitted, because there was no evidence against him, and because the prosecution's case relied so exclusively on flawed translations of an illegal phone intercept. But all through those two years, all that I encountered was fear and suspicion. For the Kashmiri and the non-Kashmiri alike, I was the brother of a man who had been called a terrorist. Once a terrorist, always a terrorist; once the brother of a terrorist, always the brother of a terrorist.

I have spoken to many people in Delhi, to Kashmiri Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims as well. I find that both communities live in fear. But there are two different kinds of fear. The Kashmiri Hindus live in fear of the terrorist. This fear is shared by the majority of people living in Delhi. It is a fear constructed to reinforce the divisions in society between Indians and Kashmiris, between Indian Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims, and between Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Hindus. This fear has pushed each community into different parts of the city and has created Muslim ghettos where Kashmiri Muslims live and feel a fragile kind of safety. The media in Delhi systematically promotes the fear of the Kashmiri terrorist.

But the very real fear felt by Kashmiri Muslims living in Delhi is never a part of public discourse. The fear of being picked up at any time, the fear of being killed in a false encounter, the fear of being tortured, the fear of not being able to get a house on rent, the fear for what might be happening to relatives left behind in Kashmir. The experience of waiting outside the gates of Tihar prison for the weekly *mulaqat* (meeting) with my brother through the two years of his captivity, have given me an insight into the world of hundreds of Kashmiris like myself who have close relatives in the prison. I began to understand their special fears and their special vulnerability. Our vulnerability.

But this shared insecurity did not bring us any closer. It stood as a wall between us, between our families. There is not a single space in the city of Delhi where Kashmiri Muslims meet together, just to be with each other, though everyone I have spoken to has expressed a desire for this space. Our shared insecurity stands like a wall that divides us from ourselves.

This is what it is like to be a Kashmiri Muslim today in Delhi.

This text has been edited and excerpted from the final report of the author's research project as an Independent Research Fellow (2004-05) with Sarai. The report has subsequently taken the shape of an expanded text, *Manufacturing Terrorism: Kashmiri Encounters with Media and the Law*, to be published by Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi, in association with Poles Apart Trust, New Delhi (forthcoming, 2006).

On Listening to Violence: Reflections of a Researcher of the Partition of India

SADAN JHA

Speakers and Listeners

There is a folk saying in north India ; a kind of social warning given to a person in pain. Perhaps it could be understood as the kind of advice a psychologist might offer, albeit with a difference:

*Rahiman nij man ki wyatha, man hi raakho goye
Sun ithalaiyehain log sab baant na linhe koi*

O Rahim, keep your suffering to yourself
Listeners will only laugh at you, no one will share your pain

I am not interested in the moral economy that this proverb represents. I am not interested in deconstructing it either. But I am interested in thinking about the way in which this fragment of folk wisdom renders the act of speaking of and listening to pain a serious interpersonal affair. The social fear of being exposed as vulnerable makes the act of speaking and sharing a difficult one. The stigma of being laughed at makes the process of soliciting listeners even more difficult.

Researching Partition / Encountering Violence

My interest in the dynamics of listening emerges out of the encounters I have had during the course of my involvement as a field researcher with *Reconstructing Lives* , a project initiated

by the scholar Ashis Nandy at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. This project collected and examined oral histories and memories of survivors of the violence that accompanied the Partition of India in 1947. Among scholars of Partition, the estimated number of deaths during that period fluctuates enormously; between two hundred thousand and two million. The number of displacements was obviously much higher. In fact, statistical figures are used with little historical sensitivity in the writings on Partition. The historical discourse of this turbulent event, as historian Gyanendra Pandey has pointed out, continues to bear the stamp of rumour, aggregating the power not so much of verifiable truth, as of a rumoured statistic: extravagant, expandable, unverifiable, but credible¹. Serious scholars, as well as right-wing political activists who want to score points, have both used numbers to heighten community and reader response to accounts of Partition trauma.

Many Partition refugees from Pakistan were re-settled in Delhi and other parts of north India. My fieldwork and research interviews were carried out during 2001-02 in the cities of Delhi and Ajmer, and in villages of Jammu (in the state of Jammu & Kashmir).

Most scholarship on the survivors of Partition violence has restricted its exploration of the speech act by problematising the figure of the speaker, the one who remembers and recounts. Yet little, if any, attention has been paid to processes to do with the act of listening. There has been hardly any thought given to the relation between violence, memory and language from the listener's perspective. A shift of emphasis from the speaker to the listener in the course of exploring the speech act helps us get another perspective on the dynamics of the sharing of the burden of violence, and the way in which the memory of violence occupies the field of the production of knowledge. This shift then enables us to understand the ways in which violence gets transmitted in the course of an interview. We begin to think about what happens to people who encounter violence through the experience of listening to accounts of it.

Writing in the context of bearing witness to Holocaust survivor testimonies, psychoanalyst Dori Laub remarks:

(B)y extension, the listener to trauma comes to be participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma himself.²

Following from Laub, one could ask: How does listening to narratives of mass violence affect the listener? Also, how does the state of victimhood get transmitted from the situation (one might even say the body) of the respondent to that of the interviewer?

These questions became very important for me. They compelled me to try and understand not just the discursive politics of mass violence, but also my own evolving self as an interviewer/listener and eventually re-narrator of my interviewees' accounts.

I have come to believe, as a result of the encounters I had in the course of research, that making the presence of the interviewer/archive builder more visible helps resist authority formation within the space of the archive. In the case of this project (more

specifically, with regard to the phase of the project that I am associated with) the issue of listening becomes more relevant, as interviewer and respondent generally enter into dialogue in a semi-structured environment, and the fear of half listening looms large both over the respondent as well as interviewer.

I began to realise that these exercises of structured listening, memories of incomplete interviews and the vivid accounts of the violent past that I was listening to regularly had also begun paying me visits in my dreams. I felt the need for a narrative presentation of these experiences for myself, in order to help come to terms, critically and empathetically, with the subjectivities I was encountering (in myself and others). I also felt the need to confront the pathological aspects of the discursive space of the reconstruction of memory that I was facing in my work.

Here I present some reflections and impressions that emerged during this process ; not as a seamless narrative, but as fragmentary mirrors of the disjointed accounts that I had grown accustomed to listening to. They were written at different times and address the different geographical locations in which these narratives were produced.

Shanti Bai / Chimni Bai, Delhi, 2001

I do not remember her face any more. Those who know me say that I have a short memory. It has been a long time since I last saw her. In fact, I for one have felt no reason to meet her again. The first and only meeting that I had with her was enough. One could say that it was complete in every respect. An image of that encounter, a vivid slice of time, is imprinted in my memory, but I can recall nothing of her face. The romance, the warmth and the pain ; all that I associate with that encounter ; none of that has betrayed my memory. They have all lived up to my expectations of them. Perhaps this is why I have not met her again, never even thought of going back to see her even once.

I was instructed to meet her again, interact more with her in order to extract more information about her life; but I never felt any desire even to see her. I had developed certain kind of fear. Despite the fact that I myself consciously believed in the significance of at least one more visit to her place, I have even avoided walking down the street where she lives. I simply cannot bear the pain.

On that very day, at the very instant of our parting, I knew for certain that I would never return. I did tell her that I would be visiting her and would love to listen to more about her life, in the coming days. She had very innocently welcomed the idea, and had extended an open invitation, saying, Whenever you wish^{af}

It never happened. The second visit has remained suspended, deferred forever. I can recall how excited I was, and how much in pain I was, even on that day when I had just finished listening to her. I do not remember how and exactly at what moment I left her side. My memory has perhaps not registered my departing gestures. However, I can vividly remember the entire sequence of events leading up to the actual interview. The amnesia that I have about the end of the meeting can be seen as having a logic of its very own. Perhaps it even demands its own interpretations. I anticipate what some of these may be, and I do

care for them. But I do not intend to resolve them, to jump over and away from them, with a neat explanatory manoeuvre, so quickly. I want the romance of the meeting to resist being contained by the violence, the pain and the suffering generated by the meeting itself.

It was an interview that I can only consider to be perfect, in its incompleteness. A scene of grief and violence like other such scenes enacted for me, and to which I listened, in countless variations, on endless occasions. Yet, in the landscape of consciousness, I am still caught within the frames of that particular meeting. Writing this text is an attempt to free myself from those chains. It is said that writing unbinds memory and its violence. However, to put those sufferings into words is itself a painful process. It is a violence of another sort.

Dhani Ram, Jammu Dayaran Camp (near Mishriwala), Jammu & Kashmir, 2002

He said, *Raamdhaari ho jaye, sulah ho jaaye. Raamdhari honi chahiye* (Let there be peace, and friendship. Peace should prevail)f.

Raamdhaari means a state of being where there is no enemy; where there is love, all-pervasive and total love.

This is how he explained the meaning of the word *Raamdhaari* to me. I was talking with him in a makeshift, recently-formed refugee camp. However, I strongly felt that he was not merely talking to me. He was in a dialogue with all his hopes and all his despair. A victim of multiple displacements, Dhani Ram talked a lot about his childhood. He talked about singing songs in Dogri, his mother tongue; songs devoted to the mother goddess. He talked about the game of *kauri* that he was fond of playing in his childhood. He then added sadly that now everybody watches television and no one knows how to sing Dogri songs. When I asked him the question regarding his memory of moments of happiness (as I was instructed to do by the interview protocols), he answered, I knew joy in my childhood. Now I do not know happiness. I eat in the morning not knowing what will happen in the evening. Here we have only sorrows for company, not happinessf.

Lambodarnath, Mishriwala Camp, Jammu, 2002

Lambodarnath, a resident of Mishriwala Camp, has a graphic memory, but his loneliness and everlasting melancholia attracted my attention more specifically. He lives alone. On the issue of happiness he said, No happiness. I have never experienced happiness. Never, from my childhood up to now. Now see, I have never worn new clothes ever in my life. I hate pridef.

Myself, Sadan Jha, Interviewer

In the course of this journey of listening to violence, I had to cross various phases. Initially, I had a peculiar numbness towards the narratives of violence and displacement that I was hearing. I had an academic background in modern Indian history. I had been exposed to scholarship and readings about the narratives of violence coming from the dark corners of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.

In contrast to the expectations that had been generated by my earlier reading of

Partition, I was not coming across case histories embedded in acts of violence that could be distinguished due to their great magnitude. The agencies of physical violence were not always clearly visible in the cases that I kept encountering during my fieldwork. But the terrain of displacement was certainly very rich, and the bodies of the narratives themselves were tortured enough to keep me occupied. In order to listen carefully and be available and alert on all these terrains, I conditioned myself to be hyper-conscious while listening to a narrative. I was resisting my numbness. Very soon this took its toll. I developed persistent symptoms of cough and allergy. The symptoms would not go away, and I realised that coughing came whenever memories of violence and pain made their way into the course of interviews. I would have an uncontrollable coughing fit each time a respondent began narrating their trauma. With the persistent cough came a strange restlessness. Incomplete interviews, rejections and denials of requests to meet with potential interviewees would bring nightmares and sleeplessness in their wake.

In the course of my fieldwork, I realised that there was a storm of feelings within me. I would experience strong outbursts of emotion, directed both at my own self as well as against my respondents. I also came to believe that my participation in the dialogue that I was having was subjecting my respondents to violence. I know that they were not directly aware of this, yet I did believe that there was a violence being directed towards them in number of invisible ways during each encounter.

Also, whenever I got a refusal, or when an interview was abandoned midway, and especially during those long hours when my respondents wanted to tell what I came to think of as the boring and unwanted details of their lives, this violence would spring up from the dark corners of my training in the social sciences. I now realise that this violence within me became even more critical whenever I failed to understand the nature of my own reactions, a failure that was frequent. Somewhere, my body was registering the violence, but was unable to understand and articulate it.

I am still unsure as to whether this was a specific question to do with the relationship between language and pain, or whether it was a more general issue of the epistemology of violence. Abstract questions started fascinating me. I started believing that I was doing great harm to my own body and my own self. I developed a mindset in which I was both a victim as well as a perpetrator.

Most of all, I wanted someone to listen to me as well.

NOTES

1. Gyanendra Pandey. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2001, Cambridge and New York), p. 91.
2. Dori Laub. Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitude of Listening. In (eds.) Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (Routledge, 1992, New York/London), p. 57.



A word cloud consisting of the word "turbulence" repeated many times. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, with some words appearing larger than others, creating a textured, monochromatic effect. The words are oriented in various directions, some horizontal, some vertical, and some at angles.

Contingent

EMEKA OKEREKE





Suffering and Smiling (2004)

Suffering and Smiling is a conceptual invention aimed at illustrating the relationship between the average Lagosian and his environment.

The environment is always treated as a different entity, while he tries hard to get along with the day in his stench. He takes pride in his self-cleanliness and closes his eye to that which forms an essential part of his definition. He waits for the government to clean up his doorstep, but of course the government is not in charge of his bathroom routines.

It is an attitude that has contaminated all genres of Lagosians; the same applies to the rich in their flamboyant taste. The preferred car is the Jeep, far away from the ground; as it places them on the proverbial high horse, and as they gallop along, shock absorbers and huge tyres protect them from the bad roads that snake all through their route.



A Long Wait (2005)

This project is a result of one of my pondering fits during late hours in the metro in Paris. As I stood waiting for the tube to arrive, I realised there were just two of us waiting (making it one person, since we usually forget to include ourselves while counting). It was deserted. Then my thoughts extended beyond the issue at hand^a

Immigration has always been a subject that snatches hours on discussion. This project tends to illustrate the dreadful situation of an immigrant. On leaving our country, our intention is the search for greener leaves; in most cases, limited to wealth accumulation and a final return to the home country.

On arrival, plans run parallel with reality: life is different, demands are high, and the system leaves no captive^a there is a delay on the date set to return home. Further delay accumulates into indefinite stay. Buying the flight ticket is not where the problem lies, but fear of disappointment. He will not return home with an empty suitcase; of course he must not be paraded and caricatured as a loser. Five years extend to ten, and ten to fifteen... Then it becomes a long wait^a one that could take a lifetime to achieve.

All these years, one dream keeps him tied to work^a the dream of homeland. He becomes a slave to this sole purpose^a

We are never free even in the face of freedom.



Land Phone Business (2005)

Land Phone Business is staged photography of an imaginary situation in Lagos. It presents a futuristic image of the extremity of a highly cultivated habit. The issue addressed here is the persistency of the hawking system in Lagos. This work stemmed from the exaggerated maxim that implies that one can buy anything, if not everything, in the midst of traffic.

Here the home phone represents a fixed entity that has been rendered mobile to fall in place with the amplitude of the city. It is also an imaginary invention that pours out of necessity.

(Images staged with actors)





Turbulence before Take-Off: Life Trajectories Spotted en Route to a Brazilian Runway

DAVID HARRIS

Woke up at 5:30 am, dragged myself out of bed into the shower. While Andrea made me breakfast I finished packing, and then I went. There were three options for getting to the international airport:

- 1) Taxi ; R\$ 88 / US\$ 44, comfy, fast, reliable
- 2) Subway to airport bus ; R\$ 24 / US\$ 12, comfy, slower, semi-reliable
- 3) Subway to public bus ; R\$ 5/ US\$ 2.50, even slower, unknown reliability, three train transfers, have to take bags on bus and watch over them in the aisle.

As my financial situation has been somewhat^a turbulent as of late, I decided to go with option three.

On the subway, I practically sleepwalked from train to train, but in navigating the transfer to the bus, dragging my bags up and down a few sets of stairs and through crowded corridors, I was forced to wake up. During my one-hour-and-forty-minute journey to the airport, and the various stages of airport pre-take-off activities, I chatted with three Brazilians who were oddly representative of what I imagine might be the wide variety of persons making their way across this 20 million-strong megalopolis to converge upon Guarulhos International Airport, on this cold and rainy winter day in São Paulo.

First, there was Selma. I met Selma on the public bus to the airport. Seems that the bus is mostly used by airport employees, as very few people actually had baggage. The bus left from a station in the eastern zone (Zona Leste) of São Paulo, a station that I had only been to once before, making this same trip in reverse.

For whatever reason, I've never been invited to, or needed to go to, or even really known about anything on that end of that metro line. Seeing the morning commute was fascinating; my train was close to empty as I left the centre of the city and headed eastward, towards the sprawling *periferia* that is home to the millions of workers who make the city tick. The train going in the opposite direction, towards the city centre (read: jobs) and away from the periphery (read: poverty), was absolutely packed with people, standing, sitting, piling in.

While I sat on the airport bus, gripping my rather large and unwieldy bag to keep it from flying all over the aisle, Selma and I had a pleasant morning chat. She had recently been transferred from one city airport to another, because the airport where she used to work is closed for remodelling and construction. Instead of being fired outright, like many of her co-workers, she was lucky enough to get a transfer (maybe because she'd worked at the cafe in the other airport for seven years). Unfortunately, the transfer added more than two hours per day to her already onerous commute.

Now, she spends more than six hours per day in transit, going to and from the airport, getting a bus, a train, a subway, and another bus. At her new job in her second airport cafe, the company is required to employ her for six months; after that, they can legally fire her with no explanation. She's worried that this will happen soon because the company is required to pay her transportation costs, which amount to about US\$ 6 per day. She told me that this is nearly as much as she is paid (minimum wage here amounts to only slightly more), so the company is losing a lot of money on her.

I ask her about her other job prospects, and she said that it's tough to find work. But, as is, she's looking forward in a certain sense to being laid off, just to end this terrible commute. The bus lurches up and over a hill, engine labouring. A news stand flashes by, its owner setting up the day's papers and magazines under a grey tarp overhang to keep them out of the rain. I think to ask Selma what she thinks of the recent scandal happening in Brazil: the troubled Worker's Party government has been caught red-handed arranging a bribery scheme in which they actually paid off senators from other parties to vote with them. She tells me that she really doesn't pay attention, as she's just got absolutely no time for such things.

Selma leaves home at 5 am, gets to work at 8, works until 4:20 pm, gets home at around 7:30 pm, and has to wake up again eight hours later to get ready for work. "I spend my life travelling," she says. Nine hours a day belong to her, for sleeping, eating, caring for her child, spending time with her husband, all of it. Just time enough for what Marx would call the "reproduction of labour-power"¹. If that.

I ask a bit more about job possibilities. She tells me she really doesn't even have time to think about it, though she seems confident that she will be able to find something. If nothing else, her mother has a small lingerie store in her neighbourhood where she could work. But that would be less than ideal, she says, it would mean cutting into the family income to pay her. I ask (thinking of my present research on the topic) if she has any friends who are maids or domestic servants. She does, and she tells me that she's really not

interested in that route, from what her friends tell her. Depending on the employer, it can be very difficult at times. I suggest that with seven years working in a restaurant, maybe she could open her own. She doesn't seem enthusiastic. I ask about her schooling, and it turns out she's only finished elementary school.

The conversation drifts to quiet, she seems very tired and goes to sleep up against the window of the bus. She doesn't ask me anything about myself during the entire conversation, not even where I'm from, how I speak Portuguese, nothing. This is fairly uncharacteristic of my encounters with Brazilians, who are usually quite curious after they hear my accent...

This of course didn't stop me from asking her all about her life. Selma was born in Maranhão, one of the poorest states in Brazil. With its primarily slave-descended, Afro-Brazilian population, and indigenous and white minorities, Maranhão has both the lowest literacy and formal employment rates in the country.² Located in the far north, three or more days by bus from São Paulo, the state has little industry to speak of beyond tourism, palm plantations and aluminium processing.

Selma moved here from Maranhão with her parents when she was very young, and has never gone back. I ask if, after seven years working at an airport, she's ever been on an airplane. Nope. She says she could some day if she wanted to, as her brother and father work for an airline that gets her access to discount tickets. But she doesn't seem very interested. We talk for another few minutes, about the city, life, etc., and then she gets off at the first stop, with all the other airport employees. I stay on a bit longer, one of the few passengers headed for another departure.



The next encounter was much quicker ; with the woman who checked me into my flight. I joked with her about my recent visa difficulties, and she was curious to know how I spoke Portuguese and asked what I was doing in Brazil, why I had come here, etc. It turned out that she had actually gotten a bachelor's degree in geography from the same university where I'm studying, the prestigious University of São Paulo (USP). She'd even taken a few classes in sociology, my very own department. From opposite sides of the shiny ticket counter, we talked about USP for five or six minutes ; professors, classes, cafeterias ; quite funny, given that there was a big line of anxious passengers behind me, a team of harried employees stumbling to heave bags onto conveyor belts behind her, and she didn't seem to be affected in the least.

After our discussion of the university, and her thorough, yet cordial questioning of my motives for being here, I ventured to ask how it was that she had ended up working at the airport. She told me that when she graduated, she had really wanted to work in physical geography, doing research, mapping, or something related, but there were just no jobs around at all. Since she'd studied English in private classes since she was a child (a virtual prerequisite for getting into USP), she took advantage of the leg up on the labour market

that this gave her, and ended up working for American Airlines because that was what she could find.

This basic social trajectory for middle-class Brazilians is something that I've seen more times than I can count here in São Paulo. A university-educated individual looking for a specific career either in the academic world or a creative field ends up giving up their search and relying on their more basic skills, or simply, their very class itself, to find work. Speaking a foreign language or possessing basic computer literacy come into play here; but often, a person's simple and even unconscious ability to manifest the cultural capital³ that their middle-class upbringing affords them seems to be a key to acquisition of these sorts of relatively well-paying, yet somewhat menial jobs. Comportment, dress, vocabulary, deployment of greetings, accents, off-hand comments about current events or cultural happenings; in this fast-paced and hyper-cosmopolitan metropolis, such affectations, even if not completely conscious, do not go unnoticed. And of course one's skin colour, in this very obviously racially divided nation, is most certainly an asset in such situations.

The recent hiring of the daughter of the governor of São Paulo state as a saleswoman at a luxury retail outlet in the city is perhaps a particularly illustrative example of the fallout of this phenomenon. Daslu, a four-storey, neo-classical behemoth of a department store,⁴ sells everything from US\$ 5,000 Chanel designer jackets to US\$ 200,000 Lamborghini sports cars, and even helicopters. In fact, during the first day of the grand opening of the store in 2005, the only clients accepted were those who arrived by helicopter on the store's two rooftop helipads. The stylishly dressed models-cum-salesgirls, called *dasluzetes*, often hail from the same class as the shoppers, making impressive salaries and calling upon their lower-class assistants in black-and-white French maid outfits to bring out clothes from the stockrooms, and champagne or espresso for clients.

Back in the airport, I ponder this American Airlines employee's impressive English language skills, her light skin, her confident and curious demeanour, her well-placed scarf and shiny company-logo lapel pin. It was almost as if she had been harvested from the ranks of the young, educated Brazilian middle class to be packaged and repackaged daily in that crisply starched outfit behind this ticket counter.

If her current station in life was a sore spot, she definitely didn't show it. Smiling and cheery on that rainy São Paulo morning, she explained to me that maybe someday she'd like to return to USP for more schooling, maybe a master's degree like the one I'm pursuing. As the harried staff continued to run about behind her, and as the line behind me grew longer, our conversation came to a cordial close; she folded up my passport, stapled my tickets together, dispatched my bags and sent me to the departure gate.



The third Brazilian I met was Marcelo, transferring from a flight coming in from Miami and on his way to Porto Alegre, one of the wealthier, more European-blooded cities in the far south of Brazil. I met him at the gate while waiting for my flight. We exchanged brief

words related to whether a particular one of the well-worn, black-leather-and-steel chairs was occupied. Again, just from hearing me talk, he struck up a conversation that went on for about 45 minutes, asking about me, my life, why I came to Brazil, sociology, California, everything. It was almost the reverse of the conversation I had with Selma, lasting ten minutes or so before he ran out of obvious questions and I was able to get in my first question about him.

Marcelo is an attaché to a Supreme Court justice in Brasília, and it sounded as if he'd just been promoted to federal district attorney or something equivalent. He graduated from the University of Brasília (a good one) in law, worked a few years as a public defender, did a master's degree in Comparative Law at the University of Miami, and then somehow ended up with his present job. Based on what I know about government salaries at his level, I'd guess that he makes about two to five times more than I do with my scholarship stipend of US\$ 1000 per month. Either way, considering that he can afford to take a week-long vacation to Miami to visit friends, he can't be doing badly.

We discussed politics, law, the new Supreme Court justice in the US, the possibility of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned, the World Social Forum, Brasília, São Paulo, San Francisco, Berkeley, Bush, Lula, government corruption, and a bunch of other stuff. Neat guy. We exchanged email addresses; I got my plane; he got his, and now here I am on the flight, where passengers are politely asked to only use the restrooms that correspond to their "class". I wonder for a moment what the first-class-only restrooms might be like. I ponder a poker-faced stroll through the first-class cabin and into the forbidden toilet, but quickly desist. Such acts of civil disobedience are not taken lightly in these troubled times. "For the convenience of Brazilian passengers, there is one flight attendant who speaks Portuguese aboard the aircraft", they announce. And now, homeward bound, my little blue passport doesn't make me so special anymore...

NOTES

1. The "reproduction of labour-power" is the effort that a person must undertake to ensure that they can continue to prepare their body (and the bodies of future generations of workers), day after day, to furnish the commodity of labour-power, which they in turn sell on the market to their employer under capitalism. *Capital*, Vol. 1. In (ed.) Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Norton, 1972, New York).
2. (Eds.) André Campos et al. *Atlas da Exclusão Social no Brasil*, Vol. 2 (Cortez Editora, 2004).
3. Pierre Bourdieu. "The Forms of Capital". In (ed.) J.G. Richardson, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Greenwood, 1985, New York), pp. 241-58.
4. Todd Benson. "An Oasis of Indulgence amid Brazil's Poverty". In *The New York Times*, 16 July 2005.

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Casting Village within City

YUSHI UEHARA



I saw a dense structure abruptly interrupting the cityscapes of Chinese urbanity, irritatingly injecting disorder into the generic sprawl of skyscrapers, officially envisioned to produce a contemporary 'garden city'. This anomalous fabric consisted of tiny towers, all seven floors high, in an extremely compressed layout, as if it were zipped up electronically. Paradoxically, the impression was one of human scale, a feeling of place and space missing in the surrounding make-believe city. I was told that this anomalously compressed settlement had previously been a farming village.

¡ Yushi Uehara, Guangzhou, 2004

Kick-Off

'Village within the City' (ViC) was born in the Pearl River Delta area when Deng Xiaoping initiated the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in the southern part of China. In order to review and understand the ViC, some information about its social geographic context is crucial. Shenzhen is a very new city that has only existed since 1978, within the formidable conditions set by China for the first inroads of the global economy. The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone is part of the apparatus used by Deng Xiaoping to divert the course of China's 'development', this being one of the factors that weakened and ultimately dismantled the Soviet Union. Deng's plan was to inject the capitalistic economic system into the communist political system. He called this the 'Open Door' policy.

With its 'One Country, Two Systems' framework which stipulated that the mainland of the People's Republic of China will maintain the socialist system, while Hong Kong and Taiwan continue under the capitalist system, China is now flourishing. Currently, the nation is experiencing a new phase of urbanisation triggered by the burgeoning economy (a doubling of the GDP within the past 10 years), and the drastic migration of the Chinese population from rural to urban areas (it is estimated that by 2020, 60% of the total population will be living in urban areas). This trajectory, combined with the momentum of a high birth rate (20,000 births per day), ensures that Chinese cities are undergoing exponential growth.

The area where Shenzhen was located was considered full of 'gifts' for the new urbanity: the zone's proximity to Hong Kong, just a 30-minute train ride away, could enable it to 'learn' how to become a global city, from the former colonial protectorate. Shenzhen stretches in an east-west direction along the China-Hong Kong border. Earlier, the area was almost an empty terrain as there was little industry other than fishing. Today, Shenzhen has become the major city of 'hasty' China: the current population of Shenzhen is about 8 million, with an average age of 26; this figure is 10 times higher than the initial demographic forecasts made in 1977.¹ The current real estate industry in Shenzhen boasts of having realised 6 million square metres of buildings in one single year, 2003. This is the context of the birth of the first 'Village within the City'.

The kick-start of ViC is anecdotal, marked by the fate of a fishing village called Caiwuwei. One day in 1977, its inhabitants found themselves mapped right onto the planned route of the new Hong Kong-Shenzhen railway line, intended to be plugged into the railway network of mainland China. Obviously, Caiwuwei had to make way for the railway line. The village was relocated in discussion with the government, and given a new position slightly more to the west of the original location. The exceedingly expanding Shenzhen quickly swallowed this tiny village; this is how the first 'Village within the City' came about. As Shenzhen swelled like an urban balloon, the assimilated village became a compact footprint of urban 'development'.

Today, 27 years after being founded, the Shenzhen SEZ (Special Economic Zone) occupies almost all the available space of that region, and is now trying to redevelop its own territory. Its great location makes the ViC extremely attractive to developers. In fact,

many developers even wish to erase the ViC and replace it with their own version of urbanity, termed 'urban renovation'. This vision is backed up by the local authorities' wish to develop the city to the point where it qualifies as China's 'global' city.

The local Shenzhen authority has almost an aversion to the ViC, claiming that its small streets are fire hazards, and that the terrain is not productively used, and lies idle. However, the ViC has undoubtedly catalysed a vital social transformation in the area. In addition, the huge migrant population that provides the manpower for this economic zone loves to live in the ViC, as the villagers offer this workforce reasonable daily infrastructure and living conditions. These conflicting perspectives of the local authority and local inhabitants are constantly being negotiated, even as the central government acknowledges that what seemed a small issue has expanded to become a systemic problem within the gigantic parameters of the national 'development' paradigm.

Unfolding

The fate of Caiwuwei is not unique. Lightning urbanisation has produced a great many 'villages within the city'. Due to the Chinese land exploitation system, these villages, once encapsulated, successfully resist being bought out by the city government; they start a nested autocratic cohabitation system, forming an intriguing autonomy of village authority within the state authority. The history of the land exploitation system is a crucial factor in this. During the agrarian revolution between 1949 and 1951, far-reaching land reforms were carried out. Land was confiscated from the large landowners and handed over to two new owners: the agricultural land went to farmers' collectives, and urbanised land reverted to the state. Ever since, the 'farmer' or 'citizen' status has been directly linked to the right to possess land; farmers do, citizens don't. This new arrangement caused serious underproduction, which compelled Deng Xiaoping to implement drastic political reforms in the late 1970s; first in the rural regions, later in the urbanised areas. Presently there is a rapid shift within the Chinese population, from being primarily agrarian to becoming primarily urban.

Before the birth of the ViC, the Chinese farmer was perfectly 'folded' into the structures imposed by the communists. Now, triggered by rapid urban development, an 'unfolding' has begun to evolve, so drastically that all the agents in the scenario seem to have lost control. This case; of 'folded' communism and the process of 'unfolding'; also exemplifies the split between the current Chinese mode of urbanisation and the mode being implemented elsewhere in the world.

Frenzied, grandiloquent, urbanisation rolls on. China is currently implementing the '400 Cities before 2020' programme, through which the government intends to populate each city with up to 1 million inhabitants. The ViC phenomenon is the first major offshoot of this national plan; it is now concentrated chiefly in the Pearl River Delta provinces, but in the future will no doubt be found throughout China.

These mysterious urban structures, which is what I consider the ViCs to be, with their fascinating physical forms, complex transformation processes and unsuspected social

dimensions, are extremely intriguing. The current Chinese mode of urbanisation gives the impression that its secret is rooted in its power to achieve the erasure of any existing built forms that stand in the way of the new 'development'; ie., the will to impose a material *tabula rasa*. The ViC model is structured within this terrain of erasure, since the status of 'farmer' is defined by China's constitution, thereby not an easy right to remove. The 'farmers', who have now gained more experience by running their new businesses, have gradually armed themselves with versatile alternative economic strategies in order to negotiate further in their own interests. The ViC has thus become a site of conflict between the authorities and the oppositional narratives of the villagers.

Mechanisms and Processes

There are four phases of development in the transformation of each ViC.

Phase One: Stand-Alone

Each ViC was once a 'stand-alone' farming village, a spontaneous agglomeration of individual low-rise dwellings. In response to pressure to urbanise, exerted by Deng's 'open door' policy (1978-1992), the authorities devised brand-new Special Economic Zone cities as the central government's top priority urbanisation project. This is the first phase in the transformation: the planning of a Soviet-styled infrastructural grid heralding the new city. The authorities avoid contact with the villagers or with potential developers. Once the plan is approved, the authorities purchase the necessary farmland for a fraction of the price ; 1/60th is not unusual ; that a 40- to 70-year lease contract (for commercial/housing building and operating) would yield.

Phase Two: Tangent

As the construction of the large Soviet-style urban grid progresses, urbanisation touches the village, in time affecting the status and rights of 'village' and 'villager'. People find their status transforming from 'farmer of farming village' to 'villager in the Village within the City'; current regulation says that if you no longer live on or from your farmland, you lose your 'farmer' status. The authorities negotiate with the villagers and purchase their farmland. The village and its farmland shrink to between 8 and 15 % percent ; classified as LCD (Land for Collective Development) and HBL (Housing-Based Land) ; and the villagers put the remaining land to commercial use to generate alternative income for the farmers. The villagers often lease their LCD to a developer, who builds on it, exploits it for 20 years, and leaves when the contract expires. This duration may appear too short a term to make such land exploitation agreements really profitable. Yet it is reasonable, as the current speed of 'innovation' in building technology is such that after 20 years, the building is simply obsolete, worth almost nothing. Although the government rarely has sufficient funds to develop new areas, the local authorities often restrict participation; Shenzhen did permit it and had a painful experience, but with 139 ViCs listed currently, Guangzhou opted not to, and preferred to let things take their course. This caution was exercised following a

developer's failure with regard to a renovation project in Shenzhen, which forced local authorities to intervene, with huge economic consequences to the surrounding villages forced to compensate for the loss.

Phase Three: Swallowing, Extrusion and Amputation

The rapidly expanding city soon surrounds the village with skyscrapers like a counter-form, and thus the village arrives at the next phase: the dense weave of low-rise block development is swallowed up by the stark silhouette of skyscrapers. After all, that is the most efficient form for generating profit. It is the outcome of a win-win situation, in which a vast amount of cheap living space is created: the villagers extrude their to-let accommodation.

In this phase, HBL defines the extent of the villagers' operation: spontaneous forms of agglomeration for each farmer's 120-metre dwelling site. As the dwelling is extruded as high as seven levels, the walking path is chiselled into deep and narrow trenches. Even more extreme is the fact that the villagers add cantilevered floors onto their tiny towers in order to maximise the floor area, making the houses resemble Chillidaesque sculptures. This creates what is known as the 'handshake' street profile, a tiny distance of about 50 cm between two facing balconies. Consequently, the 'street' is embedded under such buildings. By introducing a density code ρ ; the FAR (Floor Area Ratio)² ρ ; the condition becomes comparable to that of other cities. The FAR of these ViC areas is between 3.5 and 5.0, i.e., the reproduction of built surface area is equivalent to 3.5 to 5 times more than its original site area. This is astonishing, considering that the FAR of good European housing is approximately 1.5; that of a high-rise is 5.5 (FAR in Manhattan can touch 15, but that is completely another extreme, based on a different urban principle).

Phase Four: (As Yet Unseen) Erasure of the ViC

This is the phase scheduled for the near future. In this phase, many developers refrain from participating in the development of a ViC. A high FAR necessitates an even higher FAR (in order to be profitable), but the FAR of these villages is already too high. Chinese urbanity guides developers to achieve FAR of 3.5 in most of the newly urbanised area. Achieving more than 4, ViCs have already exceeded this density. In order for the complete intervention to succeed, the FAR of a ViC renovation must be as high as 9 (at the minimum) in order to pay costs: *land-use right transaction; clearance; new building; profit making*. There are projects that subscribed to these parameters, yet failed due to the intense and conflicting demands of all parties involved in the negotiation process. Therefore it is becoming generally acknowledged that the villagers are the only group capable of redeveloping a Phase Three village, because they are the only ones who need not pay for the land (or its use). The situation is complicated by the fact that the government refuses to pay for the necessary relocation of the ViC, preferring to allow a higher FAR. Admittedly, in time that generates more profit for the villagers from which relocation can be paid, but it aggravates the problem of the existing ViC.

Humanity Transformation

Significantly, this phenomenon is accompanied by a new human life profile in China. This is a non-architectural process, but it does influence the transformation mechanisms of the ViC. The government recently pronounced all ViC villagers to be 'citizens', meaning that the state wants farmers to lose their constitutionally guaranteed land rights in order that the current contradictions and tensions of urban development can be dissolved. Such a decree implies no farmland, no job and no possibility of operating a business, nothing for farmers to hand down to their sons. They could be termed the victims of urbanisation, and so of modernisation; at best, condemned to wealth.

It looks as though the government is seeking in this way to bring the transformation of the ViC under control. It is a matter of great importance for all parties, because it defines the limits of the land operation. In the past, villagers switched status in order to improve themselves ; by marrying a citizen, attending university, and so on ; which could have positively influenced the future of China. But the reality today is that the villagers are subject to the political identity being thrust upon them in order to deprive them of their rights.

The Wealthy Landlord Was Penniless

When the villagers sell their collective land, they embark on a one-track career. Actually, it means slightly more than this; it is about their professional transformation, the appearance of a professional profile unfolding in the context of the Chinese model of urbanisation. Earlier, 'profession' was assigned by the government, and represented the role rather than the social contract. But now, the prevalent logic is that by extruding their houses, villagers become builders; by letting their houses to the 'floating population'³ they immediately become landlords; and with the money thus earned they become investors. The system proves to be successful and is, therefore, the most common model for the villages. With no farms to run, the villagers' life is one of an endless round of *mah-jong* and *dim sum*. Those who have made money invest elsewhere in the extrusion of another Phase One village, and raise that village's commercial value accordingly.

Their financial position makes the villagers successful in business. But what do the now-wealthy businessmen-villagers do to maintain their profitable position? They send their children to Western universities, on the American east coast, for example, in the hope they will develop skills to become politically influential.

The villagers' customers, the floating population, provide the manpower for the economy of Chinese urbanisation. The 250-hectare village of Shipai in Guangzhou is, for instance, doing well by providing housing for some 40,000 of that floating population, while the 11,000 original inhabitants of the village live elsewhere in skyscrapers they themselves financed. The official population of Shenzhen is estimated at around 7 million, with an average age of 25, while the unregistered floating population is estimated at between 3-5 million.

However, the floating population is not only made up of poor people; it also includes students. According to the business consultant Shi-Bin in Shenzhen, immigration from the rural areas in China to the urbanised areas still passes through the ViC. It is the gateway to

the city. Those who successfully pass the 'entrance examination' to the new Chinese urban economy by using the ViC as their affordable base earn enough to buy an apartment in a skyscraper, and may even progress to a detached house in the suburbs.

It sounds like a fairy tale, with former farmers helping their 'colleagues' to upgrade into 'rich citizens'. But in actuality, the villagers refuse to act as a 'voluntary social welfare system'. In fact, they try to exploit new, richer markets in order to get rich 'more gloriously'.

Grab the Market

Villagers only have a limited time to get their act together. They lose all their rights as soon as the first generation (the collective owners of the land) dies. People do die, after all^a In 70 years the villagers' profitable position will have disappeared. And the government is just sitting it out.

However, there is one more threat: the Chinese economy might slow down first. But that is something about which we should not speculate.

At present, wealthy villagers are targeting housing for the 'new rich' of the ICT sector. For instance, Shipai Village in the centre of Guangzhou has recently started negotiating for a project estimated at €389 million, comprising 35-storey skyscrapers (42 in all), with another 86,000 square metres of commercial space. The plan will be financed partially out of rental from the village housing, the exploitation of the LCD and the 12-year rental contracts for commercial space.

A key figure in negotiations with the government and developers is the Village Organiser. The villagers choose him because of his background. For the Village Organiser, the thrust of the negotiations with local authorities is the demand that they ; the authorities ; foot the bill for alternative new-build for the villagers. In Shipai, the Organiser is a former officer of the Chinese army. In a skyscraper complex that was built at an earlier stage (of local development), his spacious office has black leather couches, polished stone floors, a gigantic wooden table and only two books in the glass-fronted bookcase: *The History of Chinese Communism* and *The History of the Failures of Village Organisers*. His fame in Guangzhou generates a coming-and-going of other Village Organisers with requests for advice. His response consists of two words: "Market decides!" Chinese farmers cultivate crops for the market, so this logic appeals to them.

Dreamy Winner

In the wild-west ground of the ViC, 'where' and 'when' are defining words. Along with Shipai, there are other villages in the CBD (Central Business District) area where comparable projects are under way. The first on the market grabs the biggest profit. But not all 139 ViCs in Guangzhou are as favourably placed. Location is crucial, even for the floating population, since their income is not such that they can afford public transport every day.

In this situation, some villages devise alternative sources of income. Those in Tangxi lease their land to trade and industry; villages in New University Island (described later in this essay) provide space for sites of cheap entertainment; in Nansya (a new city founded

by a tycoon from Hong Kong) the villagers supply grass for the city's brand-new golf course. Xiasha in Shenzhen is well known for nightlife provided for labourers and truck drivers from Hong Kong, and is nicknamed 'the second wife village'. Caiwuwei is popular among young rock musicians. Tianmian was relocated to a park and sold to a developer, who built luxury houses there.

Roles Produce Powers

It is our impression that there is little room for professionals, such as urbanists, in the negotiation process. There are in fact three players in the process of transformation for the ViC: the governor, the developer and the user. The balance of power between them determines the course of change.

In order to survive, the villagers attempt to initiate a market process. The developers wait and see, because it is all too complex. They cannot negotiate with the villagers directly because the government exercises control, and can issue permits based on the urban plan. Moreover, the government can manipulate the transfer of land use rights, because it can define policy. In these circumstances, the villagers necessarily concentrate on netting the maximum FAR.

The fact that the villagers have land exploitation rights would suggest they are in a strong negotiating position. However, in view of the material conditions of the ViC which are contradictory to the economic ideas of the current Chinese government, politicians are not inclined to accept the ViC phenomenon, and press for its abolition. What might the government do to ensure that the ViC manifestation does not proliferate beyond a certain stage?

The following idea has emerged: wealthy ViCs will disappear when the villagers' financial security is threatened. And that can be brought about with the provision of alternative cheap housing by the state. The villagers would lose their floating-population market as a result, and have to look for different sources of income. And if they cannot find these, the ViC will itself have to enter into the discussions. Admittedly, this approach might have adverse consequences for the ViC, but cheap housing would remain.

Riding the Powers

Sometimes, villagers are thwarted in a different way. The drawings that establish land ownership and building scope for Caiwuwei village indicate that the negotiations must have been grim. The land is divided into state property and collective property (7:4), and consists of fragmented triangles that have minimal contact with surrounding roads; building is not possible.

The failed government master plan for redevelopment states that after implementation, the villagers will still own 36% of the land, 56% of the built floor area and 9% of the housing. The FAR2 has been raised from 2.9 to 8.9, but that has only resulted in a reduction of the villagers' operational possibilities. Most architects in Shenzhen claim that redevelopment of this village is impossible. There is nothing left to develop, and any attempt would get bogged down in the requirements laid down by the government: 1/3 green space, 1/3 built area, 1/3 infrastructure.

Sometimes the picture is more positive. In 2002, construction of the multiple universities campus at New University Island (18 hectares) on the outskirts of Guangzhou was initiated. Scheduled for completion in 2008, it will house 350,000 people. Earlier, there were six villages in this area, four of which are currently in Phase Two, and by 2008 will perhaps have reached Phase Three. The government has relocated the other two villages to a neighbouring area (25 hectares), which is destined to eventually accommodate more university facilities. The government plans to combine these and other relocated villages from neighbouring development areas to form a new community there.

Victims of Urbanisation

According to Hong Kong-based Chinese market researchers, the vitality of the ViC phenomenon is based on historically defined rights and transaction principles concerning land, conceived to keep the Chinese agrarian system under control. Mao gave farming villages autonomy of operation, with each farmer obtaining an equal share of the harvest. However, one consequence of this egalitarian policy was a substantial drop in productivity. In 1963, the Private Reserved Land scheme (PRL) was introduced to prevent the complete loss of food production; it stipulated that a small part could be privately harvested with a view to boosting productivity.

In 1965, Deng Xiaoping found a way to reactivate dormant production potential: he introduced a lease system in farming, the Household Responsibility System (HRS), enabling individual farmers to lease collective land without payment. The farmers themselves were in favour of that system, and it was an immediate success. They started producing what consumers wanted; this, combined with the autonomy of the farming villages, led to the flourishing 'economic miracle'.

Accordingly, the resulting consumer-oriented approach forms the basis of the ViC operation. Urbanisation leached the rejuvenated potential from the agrarian context; farmers were its first victims.

The second set of victims was created when Deng freed domestic migration. Mobility in China is now creating a new demographic paradigm. Currently, a Chinese national can travel freely through the country simply by purchasing a cheap ticket. Shenzhen and Guangzhou are each home to between 3 and 4 million migrants, a massive floating population that comprises half of the registered citizens. Unregistered migrants, whose presence and numbers are not verifiable facts or statistics, constitute a group large enough to create a potent invisible dynamic. An unquantified and hence unknown factor, these migrants are an integral part of the ferment of Chinese urbanity.

Urbanism of Victims

When I visited the Chinese city, I experienced an unreal reality. As such, Chinese urbanity appears as one big simulacrum of pure possibilities. In this context I could refer to an authentic Chinese expression: Reading does not compare to seeing. The transformation of the Chinese city into the simulacrum of the 21st century cannot be calibrated via temporal

indices, or empirical modes such as statistics. These do not depict this reality swiftly or adequately enough. But through being a witness, one can experience this spectacle of overwhelming growth that has made impossible events possible, and has implemented transformation. In China, success can be measured by its effect upon millions; yet decisions to further enact successful policies are based on the logic of local imperatives. Such an ethos cultivates a particular kind of collective confidence: it creates a 'less-risk' bottom line for ventures. In this moral universe, where everything appears to be possible, "to do" is the standard injunction.

Under the strict policies exercised by the central government, everything would seem to be orchestrated: in China, few projects fail, and most authorities are relieved of the obligation to solve any crisis. Urbanity is absolved of responsibilities, morphed with the playful arithmetic of FAR. This is one face of urban China.

Looking elsewhere, beyond the ViC, it appears to me that most Chinese urbanisation projects take the causality of the socio-geographic context less seriously than similar projects in Western cities. We found little evidence of demands to create an explicit public domain that would define the borderlines of private projects. Ironically, current urbanisation policies, with their vision of the garden-city-of-towers, intend to meld the urban border into the surrounding environs of uninterrupted greenery. All terrain newly urbanised is seamlessly sealed with the uniform, urbanised green grass that is a dominant component of one's experience of the city. Is this because in China, everyone neglects to acknowledge that the urban development model is based on demands by groups with opposing interests? Is it because citizens have accepted the political framework of the 'One Country, Two Systems' concept? Is it because (despite differences in rhetoric and ideology) the ground realities, negotiations and compromises, as worked out in practical terms, ensure that in the end everybody wins?

If so, then the choices relate to enhancement, not integration.

But whatever happened to urbanism? The government seems to speak little of the socio-geographic context of the urbanity being produced in the current mode of urbanisation. Where are the codes of social geography that unknot the causality of urban development, where is the arena of a social welfare system in the mechanism of urbanisation? Taking ViC as an example of urbanism in the 'Age of China', would this kind of Chinese metropolis stand for taking the risk of losing urbanism altogether? Does this urbanisation bring urbanity for all people?

Urbanism, as we know it for more than a century, is based on the notion of an urban pattern, a social contract and an inclination to form. Whatever one's perspective, the emergence of public space must be backed up by a degree of abstraction that lets people think that they intervene into reality. The Chinese case demonstrates how reality can intervene in people, almost like an act of unconscious reverse engineering.

Yet I suspect we did find the systematic exception. To start with, we discovered the ViC, the *actual* Village within the City. At the feet of the green city of towers, the ViC formation thrives, surmounts this *politically failed urban form* on cost-free land, and offers cheap

lodging for the vast floating population. ViC mirrors the demands that the villagers can see with their own eyes. Villagers cultivate grass next to the golf course, run production lines that reassemble computers next to the computer market, organise the wholesale market and control delivery services at the city's edges. The ViC and its inhabitants have reinvented a city and re-created the primitive form of a social welfare system that is also a sustainable environment and a critical hub of mobility. In that context, the ViC is a 'saviour of the poor'; it has achieved a method of land use that interweaves humanity and urbanity. This random urban operation by farmers accidentally elides success and failure. Research has revealed the new direction of the ViC, where farmers aim to step ahead: after achieving success, the farmer then plans to turn his pragmatic, community-oriented impulse into a profitable investment, the expensive housing market. This fact confirms that farmers exercise urbanisation privileges based on market observation, not on principles of altruism.

Gazing upon the urban China that expands towards the limit of one's eyesight, one recognises the increasing gaps between these two urbanisations. If you were to witness this phenomenal discontinuity that proliferates on all levels, it would shatter your daydreams of unified, globalised success.

As I stood at the border of the ViC and noticed how the Soviet grid subdivides this city into fragments, I observed an urbanity in the act of shedding all political 'isms', the 'isms' that stake claims for diverse groups: singles, families, rich and poor, workers and settlers, young and old^a It is odd to observe that in China, only the Village Organiser seems to operate his projects with genuine trust in the osmotic effect of causality on patterns of urbanity. How strange that only the farmers make an effort to reassemble the dispersions of urbanity.

By recording an economic growth rate that compares to none, and by being able to repeat the success of similar calibration to Shenzhen multiple times, China has achieved unparalleled success with unmatched processes. Yet where is the attempt to realise urbanity in which all groups live together, hinging on the principle of the public domain? Where is the attempt of the urbanised to create such urbanism? China has not as yet instigated the development of her own unique footprint of urbanity, but merely resorts to a fusion of the Russian and American models. The ViC is not about the spatial display of power: it is the chance to realise such a footprint. It provides the greatest opportunity to evolve the networks of a new Chinese urban ecology.

Currently, we are witnessing the partial success of such potential. Yet this contains immense contradictions. The dispossessed who become proprietors: that's the appropriate rhetoric. One thing is sure: the 'Village within the City' has moulded a unique social amalgam and practice that may perhaps be termed the 'Urbanism of Victims'.

NOTES

1. Compare the situation in the Netherlands: in 2004, building permits were issued for a total of 27 million square metres. Shenzhen built 30 times more floor area in one year than the entire long-term ambition of the Amsterdam-Zuid Axis project. In terms of capacity, the Chinese central government initially targeted to attract 700,000 inhabitants to the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone.

2. Floor Area Ratio, the ratio between the 'buildable' part of the building plot and the number of square metres that has, or may, indeed be realised.
3. Workers migrating from the rural areas seeking temporary work in the city, with no permit to actually settle there as 'citizens' (with all the concomitant privileges).

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The Berlage Institute, Rotterdam, is an international postgraduate laboratory for education and research/design in the fields of architecture, urban planning and landscape design. It provides a critical environment for the detailed study of spatial planning issues. Its central focus is the social and cultural phenomena relevant to the future metropolis. <http://www.berlage-institute.nl/>

Tapping In:

Leaky Sovereignties and Engineered (Dis)Order in an Urban Water System¹

KAREN COELHO

A municipal water service is, like any other service, a relation among actors, a social exchange. Large engineering bureaucracies, however, tend to conceive of and portray their services as structured primarily by natural principles such as gravity, slope and depth, or by the imperatives of science and engineering. Pressure, scale, size and distance are presented as natural 'givens' – universal imperatives, free of history – and are invoked to explain the limits and parameters within which the service must operate. But, as the French social theorist of science Bruno Latour points out, the world of objects must be analytically desegregated from the world of people to apprehend the mutually interacting 'social' in both domains.² Rarely does this call ring more compellingly than in the landscapes of an engineered urban resource grid like an electricity network, a municipal water system or a road layout. Long processes of inscription on the landscape, of social relations of power, rule, resistance and compromise, come to us in the form of literally concrete realities – reservoirs, mains, distribution stations – that are putatively impersonal and fixed.

Anthropomorphic Grids

Engineering organisations such as Metrowater (Chennai's state-run water utility) insistently deny the operation of any social classificatory schemes in their provision of service. A common strategy by which engineering models are naturalised is to make people invisible, or to invoke them only as abstractions such as "the city", "areas served" or "population". As the French philosopher and cultural theorist Michel de Certeau contends in his essay "Walking the City" (2000), the totalising view of planners, or the theoretical concept of the city, is produced by being lifted high off the ground, out of the city's grasp, leaving behind

the mass of wandering lifeways that inhabit its spaces. But what de Certeau and the American political scientist James Scott (1988) portray as the distanced view from above – the God's-eye view, the eye of the sovereign that renders itself into the high-modernist logic of the grid – is in this case situated below the ground. In Chennai's municipal water utility, the underground network of pipes – monopolistic, integrated and state-controlled – is the principal actor, the embodiment of state sovereignty that claims to fulfil the water needs of each and all of the city's inhabitants.

Firmly grounded in this impersonal yet powerful agent of flows, the water bureaucracy can then rise above or deny human discretion and maintain the claim that all distribution is



effected through the working of "the system". In Chennai's underground water system, however, decisions about allocation and distribution lurk everywhere. Line pressure is the principal parameter through which distribution is conceived and discussed. The circumference of pipes, the location of valves, the depth at which interconnections are laid, the location of overhead tanks, the installation of boosters or other pumps – these are all technological options through which pressures can be (and are) calibrated in the system, and distribution/discrimination effected. Some of these parameters are more readily manipulated than others. Yet these operations are rarely talked about. Instead, line pressure is portrayed as a function of more impersonal factors, such as the amount of water available and the structure of the pipe network.

Metrowater's depot engineers, in interviews with me, shied away from any suggestion that they actively allocated water to categories of populations. "Equitable distribution" was the stated policy of the organisation, but the onus for achieving this goal was placed on the hardware, specifically on the new zoning system in the water grid, which was designed to improve pressure to all parts of the system.

Thus, the normative model and the official account is of a rational extension of the zonal

distribution system, based on city growth, population figures and categories of land use. Some ethnographic digging, however, revealed that the abstract, schematic order of the underground water grid, informed by engineering and statistical logic, had little to do with the lived and disorderly landscapes of local water use. The impersonal paradigm of pressure was subjected to daily manipulation in the localised settings of the depot. Through collusions between frontline engineers and the public, and in the easy unofficial modes so typical of official practice, bypass connections were effected, valves were manipulated, furtive handpumps were installed, pipes were raised or lowered. As one engineer explained to me:

Valves are set by agreement among two or three depot engineers and the Area Engineer. Sometimes there are conflicts, but we reach an agreement. There are practical difficulties – the pipes have not been laid properly, the design is faulty. We should put one more pump on that line but we don't know if the pipes will stand the pressure! There are all these problems, but we cannot explain this to the public – they will not understand.

Beneath the architecture of rules and policies, the landscape of the water service is full of bypass connections, underground compromises adopted in response to scarce funds and urgent demands. As one engineer said:

The system is not right. We are always firefighting – one VIP complains, and a bypass connection is given. To operate a valve, we are supposed to get permission from higher authorities, but who does! I myself am now thinking: to solve the Radhakrishnan Nagar complaint, which bypass can I operate? There are so many interconnections and bypasses. We make temporary accommodations and they become permanent!



Thus, while the sovereignty of the grid is premised on its integrity, rationality and equitability, people intimately engaged with its maintenance know it as patchy, layered, segmented. It has to contend with the active exercise of another sovereignty – that of the citizens in their need for water. The system is riddled with illegal connections. One engineer said, "As long as there is a depot there will be illegal connections – everybody knows about them". Another told me that in her depot the local councillor (politician) used depot workers so frequently to install illegal connections that she (the engineer) had, in response, developed the habit of taking different routes from her residence to the depot every morning and afternoon, so that she could catch the workers in the act: "I would find them digging a pit and they would tell me they were working on a complaint – what complaint could they be attending to at 6 pm? Entire *nagars* (townships) had illegal connections, and the councillor would have broken my arms and legs if I'd tried to cut them".

In the summer of 2002, I spent countless hours standing beside depot engineers under the blazing Chennai sun as they supervised excavations on the city streets, where Metrowater workers in their blue uniforms cut through tarmac or concrete and dug through a couple of feet of solid urban soil to uncover water pipes and joints. While these laborious manual excavations were sometimes carried out to fix leaks, clear blocks, or detect sources of pollution, they were just as often acts of policing. I was struck by the vast amounts of time and energy that the engineers spent tracking the buried histories of illegal connections, doggedly waiting as one part of the line was uncovered, then not satisfied, directing the workers to start at another point or to trench in another direction. Why all this trouble, since they all knew that the system was riddled with anomalies; in de Certeau's words, "everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts and leaks of meaning:^{3a} sieve-order" (2000:160).

Late one afternoon, the Corporation Engineer's assistant Arumugam comes into the depot I am visiting, to inform the Metrowater depot engineer that there is an illegal connection being installed in a newly constructed house in her division. The depot engineer sets off immediately to check on this. She comes back and reports that she ordered the connection cut. However, she can think or talk of nothing else for the remainder of the day. I pretend not to be listening too closely as she questions the depot manager, trying to track the antecedents of the story. She says she has heard that the previous depot engineer had collected a huge sum of money from the house owner. Part of the problem seems to be that the client has strong connections with the local councillor. After much dithering, she finally calls the councillor on the phone and tells him about her decision to cut the connection.

When I come in the next day, she is still worrying about this. She goes to the site again, this time taking me along. The workers have been asked to assemble there and have already excavated the pipes. The story seems to be that when the owner got a legal connection about six months earlier, the head water-worker Rajendran had

given him an extra open line at the entrance to the property. The owner argues, in alternately conciliatory, defensive and aggressive modes, that as the entire sector of the street is his property, he is entitled to subdivide the water connection as needed. He also claims that Rajendran had told him he could take these T-connections. Rajendran meanwhile feigns complete ignorance of all this, instead offering different histories of the pipes every few minutes - when they were laid, where they led, what connections were taken, who authorised them, who built them, etc.

We finally leave after the engineer orders the owner to come to the office with his papers the next day; the workers remove the pipes. But the engineer remains worried and nonplussed about what to do. She tells me illegal connections are not common in this depot ; MW labourers do a few, but doing them without the depot engineer's knowledge is almost unheard of. I suggest to her that she consult the Area Engineer, but she says she cannot: "These are my workers doing all this! I would be implicating not only them but the previous depot engineer! As for the councillor, he will want money from the house-owner, but he will want me to ask for it!"

What was interesting to me in this incident was the intense dilemma the engineer was thrown into by the seemingly straightforward problem of an illegal connection. She had to negotiate a labyrinth of plots constituted by rumours, illicit acts and transgressive collaborations in order to enact or exert her own agendas of personal survival, responsibility to her workers and colleagues, and a wider official accountability. She was also caught in the classic bureaucratic conundrum where, as head of the unit, she was also the newest kid on the block with at best a shallow grasp of local geographies and histories of power and collaboration. All these needed to be unravelled in order to act effectively, or at least safely.

Thus, the so-called 'givens' of the system are altered not just through the linear model of continuous rational improvement, but through unruly assertions of rights and through struggles and compromises. The ideology of an impersonal underground network of concrete or iron fixes in place the set of underground arrangements through which lower-level bureaucrats and people together fashion the ideas of state, rule and service that they can live with. The model incorporates significant silences. Illegal or bypass connections are eventually "regularised" – as much through a lack of documentation as through actual acts of regularisation. Not writing down, I found, is as much a part of bureaucratic practice as is writing.

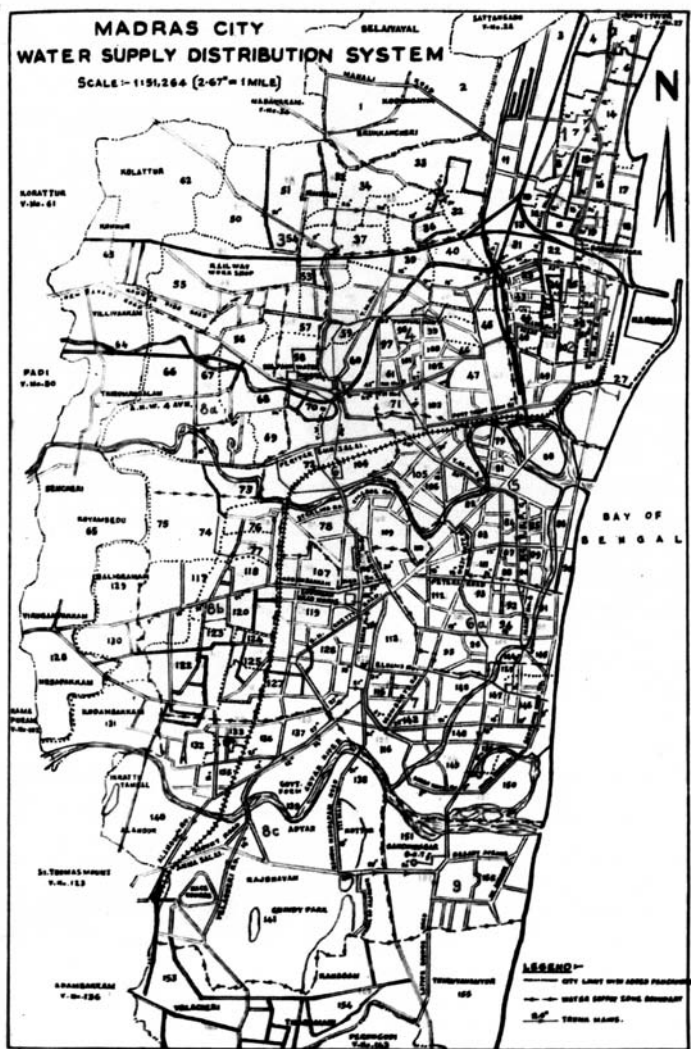
Maps of the distribution system, then, are partial accounts, idealised representations that ignore some illegal additions and incorporate others as if they were part of the original plan. Their truth is at variance with that of the social arrangements through which people tap into the system. They constitute a classic myth of state. However they also function performatively, as authoritative graphics: what is not on the map is, by definition, illegal.

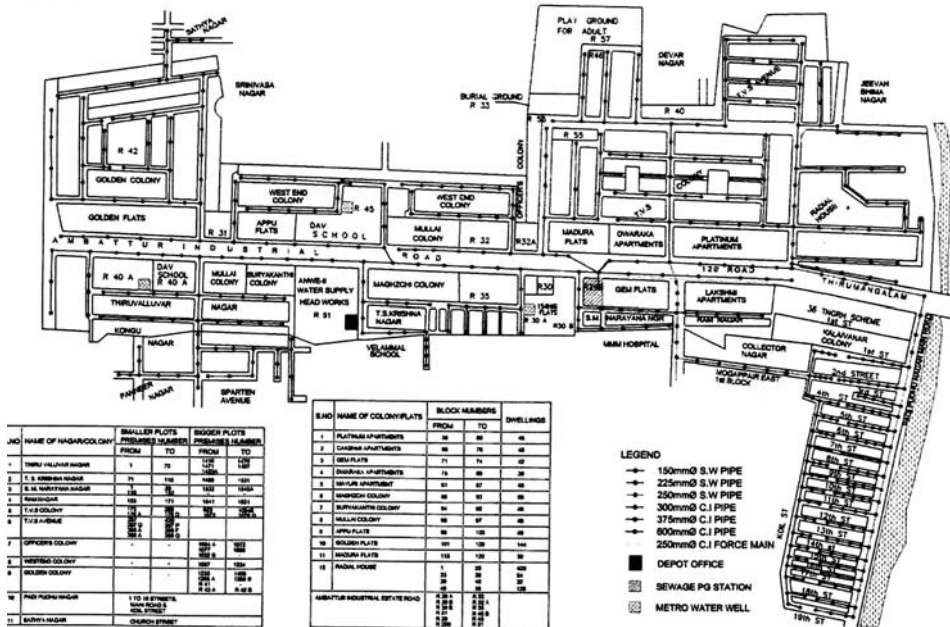
Pipes, Peripheries, Politics

^aWhich brings us back to the classificatory logics that are written into these orderly and simplifying schema. On the ground in Chennai, principles of order diverge sharply between

APPENDIX E: MAP OF THE WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

Source: MCRC 1997.



**AREA - V
CMWSSB**


Metrowater's steady drive toward commercialisation, stringent cost-auditing and user charges, and the mounting pressures on depot engineers to meet revenue collection targets, also sharpened the frontline engineer's hostility to the non revenue-paying populations of the slums. These populations were portrayed as demanding, disorderly, over-politicised and unwilling to pay – a type of 'public' that was becoming increasingly impossible for the reforming utility to serve (Coelho: 2005). In March 2005, one engineer declared: "Of all the people in this city, these are the people enjoying the most today! They don't pay taxes or charges, but they get 24-hours supply through the public standpipes, they use good treated water for everything – washing vessels, washing clothes, bathing!" She went on, "We are now trying to stop tank and truck supply as much as possible, because there is enough water coming through the pipes". However, this move encountered strong resistance in the slums, as tanks and trucks are a lucrative source of revenue for local party workers.

Interviews with women in slums revealed that the piped system was only one of a range of contaminated and irregular water sources they balanced to meet their needs. In S.P. Thottam, a complex of Tamil Nadu Housing Board tenements ringed by huts and shacks and small semi-thatched houses, women said: "We get handpump water for a few hours on alternate days, but this water sometimes has a drainage smell. We cannot always trust it. So we often have to use tank water for drinking, but this we always boil and strain. The lorries are not regular either – we cannot rely on them. Another problem with the handpumps is that water gets released at odd times – midnight, 1 am, you can never tell! Then a huge crowd gathers and starts jostling and pushing, because the water will suddenly stop. Many of the pumps don't work, so everybody crowds around one pump. A lot of fights and conflicts ensue. If you are really tough, you can push through and get some water – people like us cannot do that^a This is why we are insisting on tank water being continued. As soon as the summer comes, they will stop supplying through pipes. At least if the tank water comes everyday, we can be sure of a few pots".

In Avvainagar, where tenements and small *pukka* (permanent) houses are flanked by rows of thatched huts clustered along the banks of the river Cooum, women claimed that the area's three public fountains had not worked for nearly five years, as the local water boss, Velu, deliberately kept them in disrepair by removing washers or other parts, or tethering his cattle near the pumps so that the place was covered in cowdung. Thus, the entire community was kept dependent on water supplied by trucks that he controlled. However, they claimed: "When we had a pump here, one family controlled it. They had no formal authority, but they would hang on to it and fill every container they had, then wash some vessels, then by the time they were done, the water would stop. We paid nothing, but had no assurance of getting water. At least with the trucks one person controls them and makes sure the water is distributed".

Women in slum communities, thus, outline dense strategies of water security, involving multiple modes of access, to negotiate problems in relation to quality, timing and reliability.



These strategies are shaped by the politics of local control over sources, as well as by the double-game of the water bureaucracy as it tries on the one hand to eliminate standpipes, and on the other to stop mobile supplies as soon as piped water becomes available.

Water strategies in the slums are also shaped and encased by evolving practices of urban democracy. Elected councillors function as channels for complaints about water and sanitation in the city; many have their fingers firmly on the pulse of problems in the back alleys of the city wards. In many depots, engineers engage closely and routinely with the councillors, and prioritise complaints brought in by them. Despite this, engineers tended to characterise their obligatory daily truck with politicians as a massive nuisance and a source of daily tension. Even the illegal connections that were so ubiquitous in the system were commonly ascribed to a lumpen political influence, especially in poorer divisions. Most engineers argued that it was because of the politicians that people in the slums had become so demanding: "There is a real problem now of the public being given too much weightage in our department. Even uneducated people now know where the depot office is, who the Assistant Engineer is, what we are supposed to do. They are more arrogant now. Earlier they would not sit on the roads [in protest]! All this is because of the media and because of politicians!"

Thus, in a reform framework that defines 'good service' as financially viable response to consumer demand, the urban poor are marked as undeserving, partly because they are seen as the protégés of populist political regimes responsible for the 'institutional failures' of state-run utilities. One middle-level engineer expressed this in strong terms: "The main reforms we need in Metrowater are to educate the public and to remove political interference. This has become a government of the slums. It only wants to supply water to the slums, to people who cannot pay!"

Daily relations between engineers and local politicians at the frontline in the context of the reforms thus reproduce antinomies of order and corruption, official and unofficial, service and patronage, 'us' and 'them'. Meanwhile, their casual claim – "everybody knows there are illegal connections" – indexes a shared field of practice between frontline state personnel, the public, and politicians.

In Metrowater, despite, or because of, what everybody knew, formal knowledge about the underground system remained schematic and incomplete. Official knowledge, as carried in official maps of the grid, is constituted through an assemblage of pieces from narrative history, scientific extrapolation, popular knowledge and guesswork. A Metrowater engineer revealed how much officials relied on the local knowledge of residents and depot labourers: "When I am out there trying to fix a leak, it is often the public that comes and points out, 'Sir, this is where there is a joint, or a sluice valve, this is where somebody had fixed a leak some time back'". This account was corroborated by a city councillor: "There are no blueprints at all for the pipes that have been laid, they [the Metrowater staff] rely on us to tell them where the pipes are! They have some maps at the depots, but these are 25 years old and they are not updating them. It is only the old employees of Metrowater who know the real facts of the pipes, where the loop lines are, where the valves are. They tell the new AEs [Assistant Engineers]".

Transparency and Secrecy

Discourses of transparency often serve as masks under which the routinised secrecy which marks the culture of rule can continue to operate. Metrowater, like other reforming bureaucracies in India, loudly touts its new culture of transparency, in which the exchange of information through Citizen's Charters, Open Houses, and 24-hour complaint hotlines is a keystone. These efforts, however, are all conceived and carried out on the model of public relations, wherein the substance of the service interface is limited to a complaint-response and consumer-education mode. Clients are allowed to ask a predictable set of questions or to complain in specified formats. The engineers, in response, must "give explanations". The mode of public relations displaces the goals of transparency by covering up the failures of the system and orienting itself to appeasing consumers. As one engineer put it, "We are engineers, supposed to supply water, but we can never adequately supply, so our main job is to convince people^a People basically want to be sure of their supply, if not today, that they will at least get it soon. So you have to give them assurances, make them feel comforted, even if the government is not capable of fulfilling the promises".

On the other hand, I found that when clients posed questions about the operation of the grid, they were blocked by well-established bureaucratic devices for withholding information, honed by the new public relations skills. One such device commonly used by depot engineers is the discourse of "practical difficulties" (as in the context of valves, cited earlier in this essay), a term employed to convey a confluence of technical problems, resource constraints, disorderly histories and routinised secrecy, and serving to effectively exclude people from any substantial knowledge of or input into agency decisions and procedures. At certain moments, then, myths of disorder serve the purpose of state as well as myths of order.

For all of the rhetoric of transparency and the emphasis on data collection and dissemination, I faced an enormous challenge trying to get simple figures on water allocation across city zones for a given moment in time. Middle-level officials were puzzled that I was interested in such matters, which they believed were "too technical". The higher I went in the bureau, the more it seemed that this data was "not available" in the bureaucratic sense, where it is never made clear whether the data exists and won't be given out, or is simply not collected. When I finally got to the Chief Engineer, he confessed that these were matters kept close to the chest for frankly political reasons:

Data on allocation is maintained informally – if it is made public, everybody will ask for more. It is not necessary for people to know these details. People will start asking more, arguing. We cannot curb sectarian tendencies in our society. In most utilities where availability is a problem, they don't publicise such data.

Thus we are back to the classic Hobbesian "reason of state" – the need for controlled order to counter the "sectarian tendencies" that threaten anarchy. Yet, almost immediately, this senior official revealed the shaky foundations of this bid for order – the random criteria by which water is allocated:

After trying different things we arrived at population being the best indicator, but many areas have a floating population so even this is a problem. And then the whole city is not zone-based, it is a mix of trunk mains and zones, so it is not a watertight system. We just calibrate according to experience – it is a constant process of trial and error. I allocate a certain amount, then I see if there are complaints. If there is no panic, I may even reduce it. We watch the complaints – from the press, from Area Offices. It is a constant process of calibrating and modifying.

Thus, while access to information is central to the reforms, when it comes to the closely guarded resource at the heart of the service, information does not even exist as objective data. Instead, it is produced as knowledge, the specialised and ineffable knowledge of the experienced expert (cf. the work of the US historian of science, Theodore Porter (1995)), which is held as the linchpin of public order. The push for public accountability has somehow never penetrated to this realm, perhaps because paradigms of accountability are fleshed

out in terms of "complaints", which frame water as an issue of individual household consumption rather than one of a public asset to be collectively managed and used.⁴

Conclusion

The legibility and standard format of the grid are, according to James Scott, the premises of administrative and political control in the authoritarian high modern state. But this ethnography suggests that the myth of the orderly grid needs to be continually and ritually enacted through the mapping exercises and the policing excavations of engineers. Yet it is a myth that both the officials and large sections of the public recognise, in their daily unacknowledged and understated relations, as myth. The subterranean transgressions, well known and taken for granted, are part of the common lore of state societies. Yet, as the anthropologist Michael Hertzfeld (1992) suggests, it is these very shared secrets, these games played on both sides of the bureaucratic service counter, that maintain the theodicies, the intimacies and the indifference of nationalism.

Recent reforms in Metrowater involve attempts to fill in and complete information about the underground system, to regularise the voluntaristic extensions of water rights. This ethnography found, however, that despite the careful mapping and the ever-increasing data, thorough legibility is never entirely achievable. This is not only because policing is almost prohibitively expensive for systems this vast and intimate – whether above or below ground – but also because local officials are complicit in the local mediations that resist legibility. It is impossible to wipe out local knowledge – partly because officials are part of the people. Rather than a model of state order produced by the reductive and schematic gaze of officialdom, and opposed to the disorder of the ground, this essay presents a scenario of collaboration in which the officials of the state are engaged on both sides of the relation that produces the idea of state sovereignty.

The subversive ground-level transactions between people and lower officials offer a practical critique of high modernist aspirations: they suggest that the formal order of centralising and monumental schemes does not work for all citizens. Local dialectic engagements, like dialects, may contain organic solutions to the exigencies of everyday life, revealing multiple loci of power and opportunity, multiple points of entry and exit. While this ethnography presents a critique of totalising forms of state, it is even more a critique of neo-liberal anti-statism or rather anti-welfarism, which only sharpens processes of homogenisation to facilitate cost-auditing and market disciplines. The global reach of markets and capital relies on a global standardisation of systems, units, mechanisms. The sort of illegibility described here, then, may provide a vital margin of political safety from control by outside elites.

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NOTES

1. This essay is based on my doctoral dissertation, titled "Of Engineers, Rationalities and Rule: An Ethnography of Neoliberal Reform in an Urban Water Utility in South India". It also draws on subsequent work I did as a Sarai Independent Fellow in 2005.
2. In *The Pasteurisation of France* (1988), Latour contends that non-human actors — in his case, microbes — exercise a powerful agency in reorganising society at specific historical junctures. "(T)he Pasteurians^a redefined the social link by including the action of the microbes in it^a (T)he action of the microbes redefined not only society but also nature^a" (p. 38). My point here is that key objects in the landscape of the city exert action on the social domain, conditioned by as well as conditioning human action. Society not only comprises, but is often *made* by objects like big dams.
3. The "tragedy of the commons" argument put forward by the American ecologist Garret Hardin in 1968 held that unrestricted access to common-pool resources such as pastures spelt the destruction of the resource due to over-exploitation by individual users. This, he argued, occurred because the benefits of exploitation accrued to individuals, while the costs of exploitation were distributed among several users. Hardin's work was often cited in the 1980s in making the case for privatisation of common resources.
4. See Coelho (2005) for a fuller discussion of the "complaint" as a mechanism through which the service is structured and information exchanged across the counter in Metrowater.

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A 'Legitimate' Business Activity: Unofficial Stock Exchanges of Vijayawada

S. ANANTH

The history of the unofficial, illegal stock exchanges that operated in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh offers fascinating insights into the economic and cultural life of small towns and cities (non-metropolitan regions), and their response to the changing business environment in the immediate aftermath of globalisation and liberalisation in the early 1990s. But there is a far larger significance to the story that I would like to tell here. It has to do with the social and cultural foundations of economic activity in general, which social scientists have tended to underplay or completely ignore. The unofficial, illegal exchanges that thrived for a brief period in the 1990s were not shady organisations operating from some obscure corner of the town. Instead, they functioned openly and were the centres of phenomenal economic activity by the standards of the region. They used state-of-the-art technologies, which at that time were not available to most stock exchanges in the country. Further, their illegal status meant nothing to the populace, which accorded them high social respectability. The causes for this social respectability and widespread acceptance, despite their illegality, deserve greater attention. The leaders in the exchange shared the stage with important constitutional functionaries: Governors, Chief Ministers, Union and State Ministers among others. Indeed, this perceptible gap between legality and legitimacy throws up a number of interesting questions for the social scientist. The study of informal, unofficial exchanges of Vijayawada is necessary in order to understand the business culture of the region, how speculation operated at the ground level in the early 1990s, and other such region-specific issues. The history that I attempt to reconstruct here is of a business institution's social and cultural foundations. At this level of generality, the stock exchanges of Vijayawada are useful points of entry into a larger research problem.

Even the casual observer is struck by the way these stock exchanges leveraged the formal institutions to conduct and further their businesses – often along far more efficient lines than those carried out by their formal counterparts in different parts of the country. Quite clearly, small-town and provincial city businesses and networks were able to channelise capital from surrounding regions, often in competition with the metropolitan regions. How were they able to do so? That too when they were not even supposed to exist, according to the law. How do we understand this gap between the law and illegal reality?

Vijayawada, reputed to be the finance capital of Andhra Pradesh, housed five stock exchanges including the largest unofficial and illegal exchanges of the 1990s. These exchanges functioned just as any other legitimate business activity, often using state institutions to further their business interests. A detailed study of this phenomenon is imperative: not only to understand the investment behaviour of people in the region in the early years of the post-liberalisation era, but to also to counter the view, propagated by neo-liberals, that most 'unorganised' businesses lack sophistication, which arrives only with globalisation.

The largest of the exchanges was the Vijayawada Share Brokers Welfare Association (VSBWA). This and the other Vijayawada exchanges did not have the approval of any higher governmental authority or the larger 'official' exchanges in India (for example, the Bombay Stock Exchange). I focus here on VSBWA, which was an obvious choice of study in that the other Vijayawada exchanges were much smaller in terms of both membership and volume. Very often the smaller exchanges, namely Vijayawada Share Dealers Association, Delta Share Brokers Exchange, Vijayawada Stock Exchange and Andhra Stock Exchange, would imitate the systems and practices that existed in VSBWA. Apart from the Vijayawada Share Dealers Association (VSDA, popularly known as the 'one town exchange'), the others were only marginal players.

The following account is based on sources ranging from newspaper reports, court records, case files and records of the exchanges of Vijayawada. Most importantly, face-to-face interviews with the major players of the exchanges have been used to piece together a chapter of the city's history that a number of key participants are only too willing to forget. Information has been difficult to come by and is full of vast gaps. Nevertheless, it is valuable.

Beginnings of Stock Exchanges in Vijayawada

Vijayawada has been known for its entrepreneurial and innovative spirit and the risks that people here are willing to take. This is also evident from the manner in which the exchanges functioned. Around 1988-89, a savvy set of five or six brokers who operated in Vijayawada thought that their business would be better off if congregated at one place, and if they tried to 'match' and consolidate the buying and selling of orders that might exist amongst themselves. The brokers realised that they had a lot of common orders. Consolidating the orders would help them to avoid paying large commissions to Bombay- and Madras-based brokers. Consolidation would enable them to reduce commissions to their clients. The participant brokers claim that the idea of establishing a stock exchange sprung from this 'matching' activity. The predominant motive behind this was the strong belief that an exchange would provide greater liquidity for them.

In 1990, the existing brokers who were already trading amongst themselves informally entered into an agreement, and a Memorandum of Articles was signed to facilitate mutual trading. The Vijayawada Share Brokers Welfare Association, VSBWA, was registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 at Bandar (the district headquarters) on 23 June 1990 (registration number 194 of 1990). The initial list consisted of 21 members (the maximum permissible). Gaddipati Satyanarayana (a Kamma), T. Srinivasu (a Vysya), C. Nageswara Rao (a Kamma), and Gopal Biyani (a Marwari) were appointed as founding president, vice-president, general secretary and treasurer respectively. The office bearers reflected the social composition of those involved in the exchange, which was drawing to it all the important and dominant trading communities in the region – Kammas, Vysyas and Marwaris. Very few of the brokers were worried about the unofficial status of the exchange. Thus the registration process only formalised the informal 'matching' with the ongoing mutuality between the traders taking the shape of an association.

Though the exchange was registered in 1990, for about a year it did not undertake any trading activity. Trading in the exchange was formally inaugurated by the then- Union Minister of Commerce Pranab Mukherjee, on 10 November 1991. Surprisingly, the unofficial status of the exchange did not seem to be an issue even for the minister. The visit of the minister along with various other high-profile personalities provided great legitimacy to the exchange in the early days of its existence. This legitimacy continued till about 1996. It is of course possible that at this point of time it was not clear to anyone outside the association that the grouping was going to be a stock exchange. Immediately after its registration, the only activity the exchange undertook was to provide its members with more information about quotations and other trade-related data.

Organisational Structure and Membership

According to its bylaws, the management of the association was to be carried out by an executive committee of seven members, including the office bearers. The designated office bearers included the president, vice-president, general secretary and treasurer. In practice, the members of executive were co-opted by the president from among the members of the association. The number of executive members was subsequently increased to nine, including the office bearers. Each member of the executive committee held office for one year from the date of election. This was subsequently modified, and all office bearers and executive committee members held office for a period of two years. This system was later modified to include 'eminent' local citizens as part of the executive committee. An important criterion for a non-member to be co-opted as a member of the executive committee was that they had to have the knowledge of the stock market and should be a *peddamanishi* (lit. 'big man' in Telugu; usually refers to a prominent or respectable person) in the city. The office bearers and the executive committee were popularly referred to as the 'committee'.

The exchange called for membership in three different phases. The first phase was immediately after the registration of the society. There seems to have been very little rush to become members. Membership was given to people who paid Rs 7,500. During the

second phase, applicants paid Rs 15,000 for membership. The last phase was characterised by extreme demand (about 1000 applications) for membership, and the fee was Rs 30,000. Applicants exerted pressure on the office bearers; some had their cases recommended by ministers, members of the legislative assembly and members of parliament. The members increased from about 20 at the time of the initial registration to about 73 (in early 1990), and finally rose to about 287 at the end of the membership drive in 1991. The first expansion was carried out in order to accommodate the large clients who were already in business under the brokers of the exchange. The second expansion was carried out due to the increasing popularity of the exchange, and pressure from various sections to grant membership. Each member was allowed two trading assistants. At its height, the card value quoted as high as Rs 8 lakh.

During this first phase, friends, acquaintances and relatives of existing members were enrolled as members. This informal nature of enrolment was in tune with the general procedures at the exchange and the economic activity in the region in general. Business in the region thrives on an informal culture that may shock an outsider. Law, courts, and other formal institutions are brought into the picture only when there is a collapse of the informal order. This general pattern, it soon became clear, was repeated even in VSBWA.

The erstwhile office bearers, however, proudly proclaim that they followed strict 'procedures' in the selection process. In personal interviews, Koneru Vasudeva Rao, the treasurer of the exchange during its zenith, claimed the exchange took care to select "only educated young people". He denies that caste or other considerations had any role to play. Most of the old hands, however, deny that a rigorous selection procedure was followed.

One member closely associated with the exchange argues that the exchange was very careful while selecting members. The exchange selected only those who would be 'useful' to the growth of the institution. For people to meet this criterion, they had to be either prominent speculators/traders, or financiers, or *peddamanushulu*, eminent/prominent citizens. A large number of *peddamanushulu* were given free membership. One broker estimates that about 10% of the total membership was allocated in this manner. *Peddamanushulu* were selected from a range of fields, and included criminals-turned-politicians, government officials who were given *benami* membership (under assumed names), and leading professionals. Some of these people paid for their membership, and this category is said to have included police officers, journalists, and of course the leaders of local criminal gangs which have had a considerable presence in all spheres of life in the town, including its economic activity. Among the journalists who were active in the exchange were Anka Babu (of the daily newspaper *Udayam*) and Venkateswarulu (the then- finance manager of the newspaper *Andhra Jyothi*) – two prominent citizens of Vijayawada at that time. It is difficult to believe that the selection procedure was objective in a situation where 'recommendations' or references are an essential part of the business culture.

Trading and Settlement Practices

Interestingly, VSBWA was far ahead of the official exchanges such as the Bombay Stock Exchange (henceforth referred to as BSE) in its trading and settlement practices. It followed

a weekly settlement (Monday to Friday). This was in contrast to the official exchanges such as BSE, which normally followed a fortnightly settlement. Exchange office-bearers proudly point out that unlike the BSE, which would often merge settlements (leading to delayed payments), the VSBWA never followed this practice. The pay-in and pay-out was always completed as scheduled.¹

A unique aspect of the VSBWA was the time of trading. There were two sessions in a day: from 9.30 am to 11.00 am, and from 4.00 pm to 5.00 pm. There was trading on Saturday from 9.00 am to 11.00 am. The Vijayawada bourses were the only exchanges in India that had Saturday trading. These timings were in complete contrast to the official stock exchanges, which trade between 10 am and 3.30 pm. The timings in Vijayawada exchanges gave the smart traders excellent arbitrage opportunities. They could buy in one exchange at a discount and sell in another exchange.

A distinctive feature of the exchange was the rules governing new listings of company shares that were eligible for trading – there were none. This seems to have attracted speculators from different parts of India to this bourse. The erstwhile office bearers claim that the exchange had clear-cut rules for a company to start trading of its shares on the Vijayawada bourse. They claim that any person who wanted to trade in a particular stock/share had to furnish evidence that trade had commenced in that counter in any of the official exchanges of the country, and then members were allowed to begin trading in that counter. Critics of the committee claim that this rule was selectively used. Traders who were considered to be supporters of the committee would be given a free hand to deal in the shares of any companies, while opponents of the committee would have to abide by the letter and spirit of the rule. This caused some consternation among the opponents, as they believed that the committee was unjustly curtailing their business. Never mind the fact that these practices were illegal.

The VSBWA claimed to be trading in about 220 companies in 1992; by 1993, when the exchange activity had reached its peak, about 400 companies were involved in trading. The average daily volume of the exchange gradually increased to about Rs 20 crores in 1992, and Rs 30 crores by 1993. In this year the VSBWA reached its zenith, supposedly reaching a gross volume of between Rs 2,500 and Rs 3,000 crores. In a letter to the Chief Editor of *Eenadu*, the largest Telugu daily newspaper, the VSBWA claimed that in 1994-95 they had recorded a gross volume of Rs 4,600 crores. The volumes were far more than the average daily volumes of the official regional exchange, the Hyderabad Stock Exchange. A comparison with some of the other official stock exchanges provides greater evidence of the phenomenal success of the VSBWA. In 1990, the Cochin Stock Exchange had 476 members while the Ahmedabad Stock Exchange had 295, the Delhi Stock Exchange 124, and the Bangalore Stock Exchange had 233 members. In the Cochin Stock Exchange, about 200-250 companies were traded, and daily trading volume increased to about Rs 8 crores in 1989. VSBWA was about twice the size of the Cochin Stock Exchange, which was the biggest in South India and the fourth-largest in the country after Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi.

The success of the Vijayawada bourses was extended due to what came to be known as the 'grey' market – a completely illegal market within an illegal and unofficial market. This

'grey' market trading was frowned upon by a number of brokers and was considered to be speculative beyond acceptable levels.

The 'grey' market was speculation in its purest form. Here trading would start even before an Initial Public Offering (IPO) had closed its subscription. Two brokers would enter into trades (buying and selling) and would sign undated contract notes. These would not be submitted to the exchange; instead, these trades would be submitted and settled only after the exchange permitted regular trading at a later date. Thus, no cash actually changed hands at the 'grey' market stage. Initial public offerings of a number of fly-by-night companies were sold to unknowing investors by getting news published about the fictitious premiums that their issues were trading in at the Vijayawada bourses, in the grey market. The use of the term 'grey' market in an unofficial and illegal exchange is worth noting. It indicates that the members of the exchange had a clear sense what was legitimate and what was not.

Stock Financing (*Badla*) in VSBWA

In the 1990s, every recognised stock exchange in India was allowed to operate a stock lending and borrowing mechanism, known as the *badla* system. It has traditionally been the mechanism used for financing stock purchases by speculators. However, in the official stock exchanges the rules, regulations as well as margin requirements are clearly indicated to the lender as well as borrower. In the 1990s, a large part of the speculation in all the stock was financed through this *badla* system. In this system, the lender keeps the stocks purchased as security while collecting interest for the monies lent. The official stock exchanges guarantee the genuineness of the stocks deposited as security.

The success of all the Vijayawada stock exchanges was in large measure due to the *badla* system that was practised in the region. One broker in a personal interview proudly declared that in the Vijayawada exchange "there were no payment crises and the only risk that existed was the market risk". This was in sharp contrast to the official exchanges, which often faced such problems. The secret of this success was the variant of the '*badla* finance' that was followed in Vijayawada. Interestingly the *badla* system continued to exist in Vijayawada even after Securities and Exchange Board of India (henceforth SEBI) banned *badla* in the official exchanges. In fact, this system existed as long as the exchanges remained in existence.

Badla financing was largely restricted to VSBWA and VSDA, but practiced in all the local exchanges. There were two parts to the *badla* system. The first part was a private agreement in good faith between the borrower and the lender, and the second part, when the exchange agrees to guarantee the trade in which the duly entered agreement is formalised in the exchange system. In the first part of the *badla* transaction, two people – one borrower and one lender – would agree to finance either a security or some securities that a broker had to take delivery of in the settlement. The lender would take the delivery of the securities on behalf of the borrower and would lend the money. However, this taking delivery on behalf of the borrower was the informal agreement. The money would be given

to the borrower in the form of a cheque, as in the case of any other borrowing transaction. This transaction would complete the first part of the deal. In the second part, immediately after taking delivery of the securities, the *badla* financier who took the delivery would enter into a contract with the broker. The broker (who had borrowed the money in the first place) would buy back the securities at cost plus 1% or 2%, in a post-dated contract note.

This post-dated contract would be submitted to the exchange on the agreed date, usually the very beginning of next settlement day. Once it was submitted, the exchange would guarantee the trade. This carry forward could be continued for as long as the borrower and financier wished to. In case the financier was not willing to carry on with this arrangement into the next settlement, the borrower would either find a new financier, or would simply renegotiate the interest rates and offer higher interest. Such high returns (4% or more in a month) led to the increased participation of financiers in the exchanges.

The consequence of this easy availability of *badla* is difficult to gauge. Clearly, it led to increased speculation. Many financiers and businessmen purchased membership, only to lend money through *badla*. A significant number of rice mill owners, and even a local MLA's brother known for his criminal activities, were lending large amounts to brokers through this *badla*. The press estimated that there were about 120 *badla* financiers in the two main exchanges, VSBWA and VSDA (*Indian Express*, 18 November 1995, 27 October 1997, p. 1). Rough estimates of *badla* are put at about Rs 20 crores per settlement (essentially on a weekly basis) at the peak of the exchange's activities. A rough calculation indicates that *badla*-based volumes amounted to over Rs 900 crores; this translates into roughly 25-50% of the gross volume, based on the gross volume figures declared by VSBWA.

Nature of Trading in Vijayawada

Most of the trading was speculative in nature, as with most stock exchanges, but only much more so, though the office bearers of the always played down this aspect of their business. In a number of instances (especially during the annual general meetings) the office bearers themselves declared that their aim was to reduce speculation: they estimated the volumes of speculative trading at 60% of the total trading, and the aim of the exchange was to decrease this to about 40%, supposedly.

The VSBWA regularly advertised its virtues, including the claim that it was a solid "systems"-based company with "an unblemished track record", and which gave a high priority to investor protection. The exchange frequently advertised its commitment to "maintenance of high standards, exercising expertise in trading settlement, implementing self-regulating systems, creating awareness among investors, educating investors in investment skills and tuning our services to suit the changes in the market scene" and "pioneers in the stock market cult in the state" [sic] (*Eenadu*, 15 August 1993, p. 6).

What exactly were these "systems"?

And did they really function as efficiently as was claimed?

One such "system" was that of settlement, which undoubtedly worked well. Its smooth functioning attracted various groups. The Trade Guarantee Fund was another. A fund of this

type did not exist in any of the official exchanges of India. The local exchanges claimed that this was one of the 'advanced systems' in place in Vijayawada that did not exist even in Bombay Stock Exchange, the oldest and largest bourse. Such a fund would mean that investors would be paid by a separate exchange controlled fund in case of default by a broker who may have entered a trade. The other system that existed but only on paper was the Investor Grievance Cell (henceforth referred to as IGC). The IGC was constituted with three eminent individuals as its members. These *peddamanushulu* from the city were selected by the president of the Exchange Committee. But they actually took up very few cases, and nearly all the members concur that there was very little chance for an aggrieved investor to get justice from the internal mechanisms that existed within the stock exchange. The only time the IGC preformed its duties fully was when both the aggrieved parties were brokers. Small wonder that most of the investors opted to take their grievances to the *panchayats* of the local criminal syndicates. But there was little an aggrieved party could do if the problem was a part of the structural deficiency of the exchange itself. The president was the final arbiter in any issue, and his factional approach allegedly created more problems.

Decline and Collapse of the VSBWA

The actual trigger for the closure of the exchange was a court case filed by Rama Koteswara Rao, a leading financier in Vijayawada who was also a *badla* financier in the exchange. The case was filed through a proxy. The reason for the proxy, according to him, was that he wanted to avoid the impression that there was a personal loss and hence revenge motive in the filing of the case. A dispute arose between him and the exchange when the latter refused to pay him money amounting to over Rs 5 lakhs that he was owed in Settlement 42.² At a later date he was paid a little over Rs 2 lakhs. After the failure of efforts to get the money through the usual local 'settlement' methods of approaching and involving *peddamanushulu*, he filed a case in the Andhra Pradesh High Court (Writ Petition No. 11523/1995 on 29.9.1995).

The court's single bench was willing to let VSBWA off after ordering it to apologise, as the legal authorities viewed the case primarily as a minor breach of trust and not a major offence. Moreover, the legality of the exchange itself did not come under scrutiny. One may even believe that the 'legitimate business' paradigm operated even as far as the court was concerned. The exchanged faced problems only after the petitioners filed a writ in the AP High Court against the single bench decision, following which it went to the full bench and was heard by the Chief Justice. The High Court instructed SEBI to depute officials to study the exchange. After investigation SEBI conceded that VSBWA and VSDA were "indulging in the sale and purchase of securities which is illegal and contrary to the provisions of the Securities Contract (Regulation) Act, 1956".

The initial response of the members of the exchange was very typical of Vijayawada's business groups: they were confident that their connections and respectability would help them overcome the crisis. When asked by a local Telugu business paper about the court

case, Nagabhusanam (the president of the exchange) responded, "Nothing will happen just because three investors have gone to the court. [The exchange] still enjoys the confidence of four lakh investors in Vijayawada" (*Money Business*, 22-28 July 1995, p. 3). Members continued to claim that they were unaware of the legal status of the exchange, a claim difficult to believe. The ignorance of the members seems shocking in light of the statements made by SEBI from time to time. The local papers prominently covered the statements of G.V. Ramakrishna, the then chairman of SEBI, who clearly announced that such exchanges were illegal, and that SEBI had written to the state authorities to take necessary action. Newspaper articles were already questioning the status of the exchange. Interestingly, in March 1995 M.S.N. Reddy, one of the members of the exchange, had lodged a specific complaint to the Union Ministry of Finance, and the Central Bureau of Investigation. The Finance Ministry replied in June 1995 that it had "instructed the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the District Magistrate and the Police authorities at Vijayawada to take action against promoters/organisations for running the unrecognised stock exchange" (letter dated 15 June 1995; reference no F.1/17/SE/95, signed by V. Sachdeva, Section Officer, Ministry of Finance).

The role of the press merits special attention here. In the case of Vijayawada, considering that the newspapers were at that point of time the only sources of information about the local exchanges (and since the publicity till mid-1995 was all positive), the middle classes seem to have become convinced from local news coverage that the neighbourhood stock exchange was a very convenient and short road to wealth. Common press coverage was of the record levels of Bombay Stock Exchange Sensitive Index (Sensex) and the increased amount of foreign investment and the record subscription procured for the new offerings of companies keen on selling their shares.

Structural problems and the general bearishness that set in the markets had a great deal to do with the demise of the exchange. Bad deliveries, fake certificates and frauds increasingly made investors weary and suspicious, and most brokers agree that this led to greater risks and reduced interest in stock market speculation. Speculative capital went in search of new avenues, and there was a gradual withdrawal from the local exchange. The onset of a bear market in 1995 led to investors becoming gradually disillusioned with the potential of stocks. The internal squabbling of the exchange, and the court cases in which it was implicated, occurred at the time of the birth of National Stock Exchange (NSE), which might be interpreted as the final blow to the Vijayawada bourse. With a screen-based national market and the practice of low commissions, accompanied by an excellent price discovery mechanism, NSE made the open outcry system (or trading hall where members jostle to execute an order) of even the legal, official traditional exchanges redundant. VSBWA did not stand a chance against such a competitor. The Vijayawada exchanges also became a major centre for transactions in fake shares. It was easy to sell these locally, as there was little or no institutional protocol in place to protect investors and brokers.

Selling such shares in an official exchange would have been a problem for brokers, due to various penal provisions that could be applied. This was not the case in Vijayawada.

Since early 1995, the illegal bourses had been facing various kinds of pressures due to bad media publicity. Income tax raids, SEBI accusations, denunciation by the finance ministry, all had affected the public image of the exchange; and a series of defaults and scams involving members led to the disintegration of the trading systems. Fake shares were one of the major problems with the exchange. A report in the *Deccan Chronicle* cited the case of 1600 fake share certificates of UTI Master Gain. This report also cited the case of a dispute arbitrator (in Vijayawada, a *peddamanishi*) who forced one party to hand over 30,000 fake shares to their rivals.

The case of fake Essar Shipping shares is quite unique. About 2000 shares were sent to the share transfer agent in Madras (Data Soft Research Company Limited); these shares were returned with a letter declaring that the shares were fake. Interestingly, the police refused to even register a case (*Deccan Chronicle*, 10 July 1995, p. 17).

The strength of VSBWA had been its reputation, founded in the assurance to investors that it had a smooth settlement system in which there would be no delays in pay-in and pay-out. The collapse of broking outfits destroyed the bourse's foundations. The largest such collapse was that of Mega Corp Securities Private Limited, which had been promoted by 13 members of VSBWA. Its chairman was T. Srinivasu, who was also the general secretary of VSBWA. The total amount defaulted had been estimated at Rs 60 lakhs (*Eenadu*, 7 July 1995, p. 5). However, local brokers in personal interviews claim that it was about Rs 2 crores. In a number of ways, the collapse of Mega Corp Securities marked the beginning of the bourse's decline.

The Success of VSBWA

The unofficial, illegal exchanges of Vijayawada were a phenomenal success. Such was the popularity of the stock trading pioneered by VSBWA that it was estimated that there were about 2,978 brokers (including brokers and their authorised agents but excluding sub-brokers) at a time when the total population of the city was estimated at about 800,000. At its peak in 1994-95, the exchange claimed that its "gross total volumes were about Rs 4,000 crores" (VSBWA/PR.PB/95/3367 dated 22.07.95), while the Vijayawada Share Dealers Association (VSDA) claimed that its turnover in the first nine months of 1994-95 was Rs 1,653 crores (*Eenadu*, City Edition, 13 January 1995).

The success of VSBWA was largely due to the fact that they were one of the first organisations to initiate the process of marketing stocks like any other financial product. In a personal interview, Shyam Prasad, one of the early brokers, said that "people sold shares in Vijayawada as if they were cereals and jaggery".

The ease with which people could find a broker aided the process of rapid trading. This ease with which trading could be done led the entry of a large number of people who had little or no knowledge of speculation and investment.

VSBWA was indeed an organisation that pioneered cutting-edge technologies in trading and related technologies, including trading software, much before they were introduced by any of the official exchanges. In some cases their pioneering work had not even been

thought of by the official exchanges, and their ideas foresaw future developments in the country – for example, screen-based trading, which was the unique feature of the National Stock Exchange. From 1993 (about six months after the establishment of satellite television channels in Vijayawada), the exchanges started broadcasting real-time quotes on the local network, via the Master Channel. A significant intervention took place in mid-1994: the exchange contracted CMC Limited (at that point of time, a government undertaking) to design and implement a screen-based online trading system, which the VSBWA called 'MEGA PROJECT', for the Vijayawada exchange. The CMC was paid about Rs 1 crore and 20 lakhs for the software and basic hardware, while WIPRO Acer was paid about Rs 60 lakhs for providing members with computer terminals and other accessories. The BSE subsequently introduced a system based on similar software.

Legality and Social Acceptability

Why were the unofficial stock exchanges in Vijayawada such a roaring success? The visibility of the stock exchange and the stockbroking community in Vijayawada's social and economic life seems to have led many people to believe that trading was not illegal, though it was conducted through an unofficial exchange. This impression held till mid-1995. By late July 1995, increasing number of income tax raids and talk about SEBI enquiries, along with the news of defaults, slowly changed the general attitude towards the exchange. People began to believe that there was 'something seriously wrong'. It is plausible that the VSBWA and VSDA did not expect the State to really crack the whip. The members seem to have believed that they had sufficient 'contacts' and influence to regularise their exchange. The exchange even issued press statements that SEBI would clear their proposal to establish an official stock exchange (*The Economic Times*, 15 March 1997).

The broking community (along with print media and local cable channel) which played a substantial role in the coverage it gave to the Vijayawada stock exchanges may be considered to be largely responsible for the growth and the subsequent collapse of these exchanges. Most of the prominent dailies (except *The Hindu*; coincidentally *Business Line*, an associate publication of *The Hindu*, was the first to carry a news item that all was not well with the exchange) carried the VSBWA's daily stock quotes, as well as those of the other official exchanges. This practice had been started by *Enadu*, and was continued by others. They even carried the *badla* rates on Saturday, along with the *badla* rates of the BSE. This led a number of investors to believe that it was safe to trade in the exchange. In case any client had a doubt, the broker would always convince them, saying that he would be a guarantor to their trades. This created complacency among the investors, and it was in the interest of the brokers to foster such a lack of vigilance.

The fact that the unofficial exchanges prospered in Vijayawada should not surprise people familiar with the nature of the town's business practices. Trading and speculation were not something new to Vijayawada culture. The prosperity of the surrounding areas led to the city attracting large amounts of surplus capital, which was in turn deployed in trading and related activities long before the establishment of the stock exchange.

Stock trading and speculation had become increasingly accepted largely because a large number of people seem to think that it is one of the few means to make quick profits. The concept of rapid and easy profit is ingrained in the culture of Vijayawada, due to the large petty-bourgeois class in the region. Vijayawada is unique in that it is probably one of the few regions in India where nearly all the big/*grande* bourgeois elements have petty-bourgeois origins. The latter, aspiring to join the ranks of the rich, believe that stock market trading and speculating is one of the few opportunities available for their social advancement. Trading was a successful practice also because it was associated with all the important sections of Vijayawada society and economy. The participation or support of nearly all the powerful elements of local society (financiers, gang leaders, journalists, police), along with the fact of huge sums of money being at the disposal of the exchange, also meant that people were not willing to antagonise them.

Despite their illegality, Vijayawada stock exchanges were not taboo. They were the nerve centres of speculation, trading and financing activity. They took up various activities, including the organising of New Year celebrations where members and their families were invited and given expensive gifts. One area of the exchange deserves special mention: the active organising of seminars in Vijayawada. The exchange invited well-known members of the stock-broking fraternity, financial administrators and government functionaries. These included Pranab Mukherjee for the inauguration of the trading floor, M. Narasimham, former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Sundar Iyyar, Director of Bombay Stock Exchange, and M.R. Mayya, former Executive Director of BSE. These events were largely public relations exercises to reinforce claims to legality rather than aimed at actual investor education and protection.

The experience of the unofficial, illegal exchanges clearly indicates that as long as they functioned, these organisations worked in a manner that was no different from official organisations. The fact that they operated and thrived in a system that was reinforced by existent formal networks merely adds to the dichotomy of Indian business culture. Weber (1930:22) believed that the stock exchanges are places which "rationalise speculation", but in the case of Vijayawada exchanges seemed to have been places that allowed speculation to flourish unhindered as long as it was profitable for capital. Once the risks involved in speculation far exceeded the rewards, the market place rather than governmental action killed off these speculative unregulated enterprises. The Vijayawada exchanges seem to have aggravated the modern regulatory dilemma that has essentially followed the Weberian paradigm – regulating the individual speculator (or the financial strength of the speculator), rather than curbing speculation itself. Weber in his study of agricultural commodity exchanges believed that it was impossible to stop speculation; therefore it was better to regulate the class of speculators rather than trying to curb speculation itself. Such regulation would reduce the possibility of systemic collapse. The case of Vijayawada exchanges seem to suggest that Indian regulators, like their international counterparts, believe this to be the easier option.

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NOTES

1. There are different stages in stock market trading. Executing a trade is just one part of stock market transaction. The settlement of the transaction is essentially a back office operation and takes place after the end of the trading period (known as settlement). All the trades are settled by way of paying cash (on the part of the buyers) and delivering securities/shares (on the part of the sellers). The pay-in denotes a period when both the parties to complete their payment and then lodge their securities (as may be the case). Pay-out is a term used to denote disbursement of the cash and securities. In the past, the BSE followed a system where the trades were settled on a monthly basis, in order to allow investors from non-metropolitan areas to send money and share certificates. As it was believed that this led to rampant speculation, this was reduced to two weeks. Vijayawada exchanges had a weekly settlement system, one of the first in the country.
2. At the end of each week, trades in the bourse are settled through the giving of cash or the delivery of stocks. A settlement number is assigned by the exchange to all transactions of that particular week; 1 April being the start of the financial year, the trades of that week fall within Settlement 1. Settlement 42 can thus be identified as a transaction that took place 42 weeks from this date.

REFERENCE

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (George Allen & Unwin, 1930, London).

Notes from Beseiged Neighbourhoods

A word cloud visualization of the word "turbulence". The word is repeated numerous times in various sizes, orientations, and colors (including shades of blue, green, and yellow). The words are arranged in a dense, swirling pattern, creating a sense of movement and chaos. The background is a solid light blue.

Nangla Maanchi is the name of a settlement in Delhi that grew over the last 30 years along the western bank of the river Yamuna, over the fly-ash deposits of a thermal power plant. As this settlement expanded in myriad ways, self-organising its internal architecture of houses and lanes, it remained hospitable and welcoming to many working-class immigrants into the city. During the same 30 years, the city of Delhi also developed, and so did its ambitions of being a triumphal city. Nangla Maanchi could not be permitted to stand uninterrupted in the face of this ambition. Like most other settlements along the river, it had to go. The judiciary and city administration together ensured that it would not be allowed to linger and obstruct the proposed new design of the riverfront.

Since 2004, a few practitioners from Nangla have been using a small Cybermohalla lab to think and write the many textures, rhythms, biographies and stories that animate an urban space like Nangla Maanchi, make it breathe and grow. These practitioners were in dialogue with colleagues from CM labs in another squatter settlement, the LNJP *basti*, and the sprawling resettlement colony of Dakshinpuri. Their reflections are eloquently summed up in this simple couplet about Nangla:

*Pyaason ki pyaas bujhata hai Nangla,
Dilli shehr mein aane walon ka basera hai Nangla*

It quenches the thirst of the thirsty, such is Nangla,
It shelters those who come to the city of Delhi, such is Nangla

On 29 March 2006, the municipal demolition squad arrived at Nangla. The space became an outside for its own inhabitants, as it witnessed the razing of the boundaries that made it a neighbourhood. Anybody could walk in and walk out. The young practitioners of the lab dismantled all the things that make a lab, along with packing up their own family possessions, and prepared themselves for the long battle of shaping life after this big blow. Joined by fellow practitioners from the Dakshinpuri and LNJP labs, by teachers and community workers from Ankur and by practitioners from Sarai, they struggled with writing their everyday. They talked to people daily. They extended the thresholds of their listening. They recorded innumerable voices. They collected documents as evidence for court proceedings. They debated on how to frame the desolate topography of abandonment, of destruction. They visited evictees in their new houses and shelters being erected pole-by-pole, mat-by-mat, in other areas. They travelled long distances to look at the barren promised land of resettlement. They sat inside the stripped, empty lab, and talked with visitors about the approaching new city. They discussed Nangla with people at bus stands and in their own homes and in different localities. They wrote, translated and shared their impressions of this event with the wider world through a blog.

This collection of writings is from the blog that records this moment. A moment that is increasingly a reality in the daily life of the city of Delhi.

Today, Nangla's entrance lies littered with the handbills of property dealers, suggesting possible spaces for relocation on the city's periphery. Turbulent times for Nangla's inhabitants are not over. The settlement stands half-demolished, without electricity, and with its community structures shattered and dispersed. Its inhabitants continue to search the city for spaces to begin new lives, and await the decisions of the courts on the destiny of the site that once was their home.

Prabhat Kumar Jha (Ankur) / Jeebesh Bagchi (Sarai)
25 June 2006, Delhi

Nangla's Delhi

CYBERMOHALLA PRACTITIONERS

The Road opposite Nangla

27/05/2006

Jaanu

There is a popular saying in Nangla:

A cooling river and a pair of hissing serpents flank Nangla Maanchi.

The river is the Yamuna, and the serpents are the two wide lanes of the Ring Road with their speeding traffic.

Even strangers clasp each others hands to navigate the Ring Road.

Loudspeaker

10/03/2006

Jaanu

A sound emerges from the loudspeaker of the mosque, and spreading through the lanes, envelops the settlement, giving it something unique to be recognised by. Every place has mosques, but there is something special about the experience of the mosque here. Each evening, a new sound emanates from here and makes home in people's minds. Sometimes the sound startles; sometimes it brings joy. Whatever the feeling, the sound makes everyone halt for a while. People otherwise immersed in their work pause for a moment. Feet stop on the way to their destinations, morsels of food remain uneaten in hands and mouths.

Some sounds have become very common, and do not cause anyone concern. But there are a few which snatch away people's hunger, thirst and moments of leisure, despite having become common. And there are those which mean trouble for one person alone, but everyone's ears perk up on hearing them. This last is a familiar sound; the announcement about a missing child.

Pay attention! This announcement is about a little boy, wearing a cream-coloured outfit, blue Roopali slippers on his feet, short hair. His age is about 3 to 5 years. His name is Danish, his father's name is Nasruddin. Please come to the mosque and take your child. The main *hafiz* (custodian) of the mosque continues to call out till the child's family comes

to take the child. Sometimes the microphone is placed in front of the crying child so that his or her parents or neighbours can recognise the voice. The child wails *ammif* or *maf*, *abbuf* or *papaf*, depending on how he or she addresses her parents. Or the child simply cries. These are quiet sounds, which drift with the wind and then fade away.

But some sounds lash everyone like thunder, bringing disquiet with them. Like announcements to get ration cards and identity cards made. People line up outside the mosque to find out where the documents will be made. Then the *hafiz* makes his inquiries from the *pradhan* (the local leader) and announces all the details from the microphone of the mosque, bringing some comfort to everyone. Now people forego their work and leisure, and get down to filling and submitting the requisite forms.

Some sounds are strangers. For instance: Mr Such-and-Such has been looking for Mr So-and-So since this morning. Wherever you are, please come to the mosque and meet him*f*. *Hafiz sahib* calls out like this many times.

Some sounds are event sounds, or incident sounds. Once a young boy met with an accident, and this was announced from the mosque: A 15-year-old boy has met with an accident near the traffic light on the Ring Road. Everyone, please reach there and identify him*f*. On hearing this, people immediately begin to make their way to the spot.

There are sounds of things getting lost or having been stolen, and then being found: Some gentleman has dropped his bag. The name is Ghiyasuddin. There is around Rs 400 in the bag. *Bhai sahib* (brother), kindly come to the mosque and take your bag*f*.

There is another prominent sound in the settlement; that of contestants in elections. When important politicians like Tajdar Babbar, V.P. Singh, etc. arrive, it is announced from the mosque: The entire settlement is requested to reach the Ring Road and get onto the bus that is waiting there. There is a rally today at Jantar Mantar against the demolition of *jhuggis* (squatter dwellings)*f*.

People get all the latest news in this way, via the microphone.

Sometimes the news is so harsh that it makes everyone's hearts ache: The settlement is going to be broken today. Everyone should stay at home*f*. But today, even this has become common. Not much thought is given to it any more. Still, some people's breathing becomes quicker and frailer on hearing it.

Oh, but I almost forgot one pleasant sound: Today so-and-so is getting married. Everyone who has been invited, please come to the school for the feast⁸ One more thing! Our Hindu brothers are also requested to come. Special arrangements have been made for your food*f*. This can be heard on some evenings.

There is also a sound that can be heard every morning. It announces that it is time for children to reach the mosque for their daily tutoring. The sound of the *azaan* (call to prayer) and the *namaaz* can be heard at the scheduled time. And during festivals such as Eid, Bakr-Eid, Muharram, and on Fridays, it is as if small crowds of voices rise and spread from the mosque.

Notice Board

10/02/2006

Jaanu and Lakhmi C. Kohli

Signboards.

Sometimes they tell the way, sometimes they give unsolicited advice, sometimes they instruct on how to conduct oneself in the city, and sometimes they distract by making one's attention wander. Gas pipeline underneath. Do not excavate. The name of this crossroad is ()f. Welcome to Delhi Railway Stationf. Get your tenant verified before trusting him with your housef. Punctured tyres are repaired heref. And then, amidst the quiet breathing of many in front of an emergency ward, a board announcing Emergency Wardf. Please Use Mef written on garbage bins. And a board in my neighbourhood that gives the impression of the presence of a property dealer in the vicinity: Cheap plots available heref. There is one more board that falls in the company of these boards. It's a notice board that appears from time to time in front of city colonies in the wake of the state's cleanliness drivesf. It's a board that doesn't say anything of its own, but repeats the contents of the sheet that is pasted on it. One such board stands in front of a locality in my neighbourhood. It reads: This land is the property of the government. It should be vacated.f

Everyone's hair stood on end each time they saw this board.

It was the cowdust hour, a dusty dusk. Komal *bhai* read this board as he entered the settlement. Image after image appeared and marred in his mind. Carrying these forming, dissolving images through narrow lanes, he reached his house. He rested his hand on the frame of the door and called out, Meena, open the doorf. Meena recognised her husband's voice and opened the door immediately.

Komal *bhai* said, Take these bananas. Where is *amma*? Has she eaten dinner?f

Komal *bhai*'s mother heard his voice and said, Yes, son. *Bahu* (daughter-in-law) fed me, and was sitting with me when you came. Now both of you eat and then get a good night's restf. Komal *bhai* washed his hands and face, asked Meena for his waistcloth, wiped his face with it and then tied it around his waist. Meena had spread some newspaper on the bed, laid a plate with food on it, and now she sat waiting for Komal. He came and immediately broke a piece of bread. Then, as he put the morsel in his mouth, he said,

Meena, why don't you eat^af

He became quite for a while, and then said, Meena, have you heard^a?f

Why, what happened?f she asked.

Komal *bhai* said, Today as I entered the settlement, my eyes fell on a blue board. It read, This land is the property of the government. Vacate it f.

I have known about this for some days now. Ask *amma*, if you likef.

Amma couldn't contain herself any longer and came and sat on the bed by her son. She said, Son, there's nothing new in thisf.

But there is, mother. I read the board todayf.

But son, that board has been there since Tuesday. *Bahu* pointed it out to me. Everyone

knows about it. Son, worrying will not help. Go to sleep. Whatever will be, tomorrow morning, will be^f.

The night was pitch dark. The window of the room was open, but nothing stirred. It was as dark inside as it was outside. Everything looked alike. The footsteps of a drunk man began to be heard. Lost in his own world, he was saying something. Suddenly, his voice became louder:

Mark my words! This settlement will get broken tomorrow. Otherwise I will change my name!^f

Another voice came, I dare you to even touch this settlement!^f

Tomorrow it will be seen! Tomorrow it will be seen!^f

As soon as Meena heard these voices, she got out of her bed and said to Komal, This settlement won't remain tomorrow^f.

You've seen a bad dream. Go to sleep^f. Saying this, Komal turned over to go back to sleep, when he heard the same voice. He raised his head and concentrated. He heard: This settlement will be broken tomorrow! Don't think I am drunk, I am in my senses today!^f

Komal said, He is some mad drunkard. Don't worry, Meena. Come, sleep next to me^f. Komal and Meena woke up together in the morning. Both listened to the sounds coming from the window, trying to make out the time from these sounds. But they felt disoriented. Waves of silence and restlessness seemed to be flowing in through the window.

Komal jumped out of bed, opened the door and looked out. He stepped out, moving through the lanes, towards the entrance to the locality. Doors to every house were open. It seemed there were far more doors, too few walls in these lanes. This was the morning when the drunkard's words were going to become reality. Police forces descended on the settlement like a fog, settling over everything, changing everything just through the touch of long fingers. Spotting a uniformed man, Komal walked up to him and asked, *Bhai*, what is going on here?^f

The policeman replied, Why? Haven't you read the notice board?^f

No sir, I haven't^f.

Well then! Empty the colony! It will be demolished today^f.

Seeing Komal talk to the policeman, some people came and stood near him. The words of the drunkard began to ring in their ears, as if mocking them: You thought I was drunk last night! Look, look for yourself now! Watch the liquor from last night flow today morning! Now go and vacate your houses. Go! All these big bosses ; these policemen ; they are not going to stand here wasting their time!^f

Komal turned towards his settlement, looking at the narrow lane leading into it. In all these years that it had been there, today was going to be the first time that a vehicle other than a bicycle was going to pass through it.

This first vehicle was going to be a bulldozer. And once it passed through, there would be no scope left for any other vehicle to pass through ever again.

Where^a?f

09/02/2006

Ankur

Manilal reached Shershah School to get his daughter admitted.

The teacher asked, Where do you live?f

In Nangla Maanchi f, Manilal said.

Where is that?f

Do you know the road that leads to NOIDA from in front of Pragati Maidan? It s on that same road, beyond the red light immediately after Pragati Maidan f.

Yes, I know. The swamps with a few bushes^a almost a lake^a But there aren t any houses there f, the teacher said, trying to recollect the place.

But now there are, madam j f, Manilal said.

It was quite difficult to explain. No one used to go to this place that Manilal was talking about. Everyone used to pass it by on the Ring Road that lay in front of it. Then four or five families filled up some parts of the swamp with sand and built their houses there. They covered as much area as they could manage. These were houses without walls, with a tarpaulin sheet as roof. People who lived there would be out in the city all day, and return here in the evening. They felt lonely here. There would be darkness all around them in the evening. Lights twinkling inside the few houses in the expanse would deepen the darkness. No one came near their houses at night while they slept. In the morning, everyone would wake up to the same four or five people around them.

Manilal was one of these people. He knew that as much land as he could labour and fill would become his. He was quite clever. He made a lot of land his own by filling it. He had come to the city alone, but now he decided to call his family from the village. His brother-in-law was the first to arrive. They made some plans, filled up and acquired land according to their calculations, and built their house on it. Then both of them called their wives and children.

In this way, some more people came and settled there. Then an environment began to form ; residents would go to work in the morning, return in the evening, buy household items from neighbouring Maharani Bagh, Bhogal, Ashram, cook at home, chat with their children. This is when Manilal decided to get his daughter Minu admitted in school. She got admission in the 1st standard. Now Manilal would drop her to school, and pick her up when school ended. When, on the way back from school, he would ask the bus conductor for a ticket to Nangla, the conductor would ask, For where?f

Then Manilal would tell them the same thing he had told the teacher. But slowly, the settlement grew and expanded, and with that, news about it percolated into the city.

What Was Nangla

22/03/2006

Dilip

1. He calls himself the *pradhan* of this area. Clad in a *kurta* and a *dhoti*, a cap with a pointed tip set on his head, he said, Listen. In the beginning there was water all around. We got it filled with sand. What we didn't fill up now flows as the river Yamuna. The settlement which came up by the river has three parts in it, all of which together are known by the name Nangla Maanchif.

2. He is 28 years old, and his hairstyle is like the hero Salman Khan's in the movie *Tere Naam* (I Dedicate to You). He is wearing white pants and a black shirt with shining pearls sewn on it. Friend, there was nothing but swamps here, which three or four people filled up. I was one of them, though I was so young at the time. As soon as the swamp got filled up, house after house came up here.

Bunty

11/03/2006

Ankur

It was one morning that I first saw that 17-year-old boy in this neighbourhood^a. He was a somewhat dark complexioned, and weak in one arm and leg. He wore a white shirt and a pair of black pants that day. He had a pen in one pocket of his trousers and a mirror in the other. He was walking down the lane saying, Hello, good morning^f to everyone he passed. Some children followed him around, calling out, Madman, madman!^f At that time, seeing him, I couldn't think about him beyond what I saw.

Slowly, through his mode of talking, his style of dressing, his ways and his manner, he made a place in many hearts. He would roam around the *basti* (settlement) with what seemed like the curiosity of an outsider. He could be seen anywhere. Wherever people would see him, they would say, Bunty, do you want to eat something?^f and he would reply, No, I have already eaten with the *amma* there^f. Children would chase him and tease him, and when this troubled him, Bunty would pick up in his arms any passing street dog and scare them with it. But as one of his hands was weak, the dog would slip out, and this is what frightened the kids the most. They would run away.

Bunty was very fond of dogs. One could often see him carry a little pup around with him. And when he would go to sleep at night; on some bench or bit of raised ground in the *basti*; he would tie the pup next to him. And in the morning he would walk around with it in his arms again.

He came to my lane one day and started talking to everyone. It was evening. Sunlight was receding, and there was no electricity. He came and sat on a raised platform. People gathered around him. They all wanted to know more about him.

My father asked, very gently, Son, tell me, where is your home?^f

Bunty replied, very quietly, Uncle, in Bihar^f.

Papa asked, How did you come here?^f

Uncle, I was playing inside a train with my friends. Suddenly the train started moving. All my friends hopped out. But I couldn't, because of my weak leg. I got off at Nizamuddin in Delhi, and came to Nangla. Here I met this sister^a^f (he pointed to a middle-aged woman we knew).

He kept chatting with everyone for some time. Then he ate at my home. He left our *basti* that day. People still remember him.

Of Late

02/02/2006

Jaanu

Of late, Nangla seems to be emptying. When I step out for a walk in the evening, there are fewer people in the lanes. Till recently, I used to have to watch my step; but now it seems to me I can walk without care.

The group of men who had made the threshold of one of their houses their usual spot to play cards, were a usual sight. I haven't seen them around for some days now.

Far fewer people can be seen in the market. Sellers sit around, waiting, with nothing to do. A friend tells me he gets ample space to play these days. Earlier he either had to make do with little, or had to capture^f space.

People who manage or own eating places say a lot of food gets left over from the day, even though they prepare it in quantities that would usually get consumed in a single day.

Fewer CDs and television sets are being rented out from shops.

Public toilets don't open at 4:30 am as before.

The person who mans the STD phone booth says almost no one comes to make calls these days. Maybe now they don't need a phone to keep in touch with the places they used to call up.

X-1 Days to Disappearance

28/03/2006

Shveta Sarda

Packing up and leaving from Nangla has begun. According to Shabana, Ankur has also left. This is a very rapid development; when I met him last Tuesday, there was no talk of this possibility; but by Sunday his family shifted out.

But Nangla was lively today. There were two new faces, Riyaaz and Omveer. Mukesh (who I sometimes run into in Bhogal, near where I live) was also there. Akhilesh and Dilip as well. Of course, Jaanu was there. He said, Nangla Maanchi is not breaking this week, so you are seeing so many faces^f. As I entered Nangla, there was a tempo with an entire house packed

in, ready to move. Akhilesh said, Wadhwa Tempof. I met him at the entrance. It s not a Nangla tempo. They have got someone from outside to move their thingsf. There was a huge rally yesterday at Jantar Mantar. Tajdar Babbar, V.P. Singh^a all political leaders were present. Anwari *aapa* (elder sister), who everyone knows but whose name it takes everyone time to remember, had walked around Nangla yesterday with a big stick, catching young men by their collar and telling them, Go to the rallyf. She has lived in Nangla forever. A young man walked around saying, This is where I grew up, this is where my grandmother died. What should I leave behind here, what should I take with me?f Many went to the rally. It was a huge rally. Women went in big numbers. They lost their slippers in the rush of the rally. And also because they took them off and beat the police. And there was police. Tear Gas. Firing. Water hoses. Mistryjif is just one who has come back with a bullet hole in his arm. We beat them with all our might. We had gone wearing old slippers so that we would not regret losing them, or their breakingf, said the women. They all went with *belans* (rolling pins) and sticks, and used them.

But faces are smiling today. They have been told the demolitions will be postponed by three months; Ajay Maken (Minister of State for Urban Development) has promised this. The truth value of this will be known once some of our comrades go to the nearby police station to ask them on which date they have been asked to be present to oversee and control the crowd^f during demolitions. Jaanu had gone to the police station yesterday, with Avantika and Shabana from Ankur. The head constable looked at them, then through his papers, then around the room, then back at them. Oh, it will certainly be felled. See, I don t want to break it. But break it will. If not today, then tomorrow. But sooner rather than later. Our force will be present. It has to be. Otherwise, how will it happen? See, demolitions will happen over four days. First, two days of peacefully trying to evict, and the last two days to make it happen, one way or the other. First the most illegal dwellings, and last the pre-98 ones^f. So now we all have a clearer image, and can rehearse it in our minds before it happens. The landlady of the house in which the CM lab is, and who lives above the lab, has emptied her house. If it is postponed by three months, maybe I can let it out to someone else. I have packed up. When it has to break, then why wait?f She had gone to some meeting this morning, and was not there when the lab had to be opened; Jaanu just undid the screws of the bolt and opened the lab. She had come in, holding her child to her breast, laughing and saying, I will have you reported for breaking in!f She spent the entire morning washing the house and the corridor, cleaning everything. There has been no electricity in Nangla since yesterday morning. It s probably a local cutf, Jaanu said. Maybe they cut it or people would not have gone to the rally. I am sure they are replacing cables right now. I am sure it will be back by eveningf. Everyone agrees. You should have seen this place yesterday^a f Jaanu again. I walked around after people had left for the rally and put stickers [*It quenches the thirst of the thirsty*]^a on everyone s thresholds. I almost got beaten up. But everyone is happy with them today. Make sure we have more tomorrow, ok? We ve run out of the ones we had here^f. It was as if the entire locality had gone fluid today^a so many people just came into the lab. Just dropping in, chitchatting, and going away. Old men, drunk men,

young men, all men. What are you people doing?^f Just general conversation. Jaanu has decided not to remove the photographs he has stuck on the walls. When the *basti* breaks, and this room is broken, they will fly around, and people who pass through will pick them up as puzzles without a location^a^f We made plans today: for a broadsheet, for texts, for photographs of *saji hui* (decorated) Nangla; for mails to be written on the CM list, for companion conversations in the other labs; about the speed of time in thinking about the making of Nangla and the speed of time as we wait for it to be broken; about how to write about people who just dropped in for a while today, about the texts everyone had written, about Jaanu's plans to play his recording of the Loudspeaker^f text, maybe from a deck or from the microphone of the *masjid*; about making the lab a convivial space for the coming time, even if short; about mails sent out on various lists and about how many stories will now slowly link in, about people shifting, about cricket, about things in general. Now I am waiting to see what tomorrow morning will bring.

Everything Is Under Control^a^f

30/03/2006

Love Anand

A group of policemen is standing at the corner of the lane, as you enter. They are chatting. One of them is holding a black walkie-talkie, shaped like a portable radio. It suddenly comes to life with a voice crackling through it. The policeman holding it replies, Sir, yes, work is progressing well. Everything is under control. The houses that are supposed to be broken are being broken. Everything is under control. Yes sir, our force is all over, sir. We have spread ourselves all over the *basti*^f.

What's the latest?^f

People whose houses have to be broken are removing their things quickly and leaving, or sitting together somewhere. Sir, I will keep reporting to you, sir^f

The disembodied voice sounds satisfied.

The policemen have pasted their backs to the walls of a house, so that people struggling down the lane with their beds, bags and other things are not blocked, don't stop. An official in plainclothes and two policemen are walking around in a group. The plainclothes man looks around. He is holding a bound sheaf of papers. He looks around, then looks at his bound papers. Then he points: One, two, three^a^f Men with hammers, who have come with him, begin to move towards the first house he has pointed at. People and families who know their houses are to be broken have been emptying their houses. Their hands have not stopped in breaking apart the decorations that they had once made with their own hands. A man stops before a family packing their things and says, *Bhai sahib*, take the plastic and metal things you can carry, sell the rest to a scrap dealer^f. There is a *mela* (carnival) of scrap dealers in the lanes of Nangla today. They are filling big sacks with plastic and iron and weighing them. The dealers in scrap have no rest today; no quiet moment. They have come today not only on bicycles, but with pushcarts as well.

A man passes, wheeling his cycle laden with his tools, calling out, Get your stoves repaired, get your stoves repaired...f

Maybe he is also searching for his everyday in the lanes of Nangla. He keeps calling out, and then passes on, through one lane, into another.

No Thoroughfare

12/04/2006

Nasreen

When I went to Nangla Maanchi for the first time, walking through the lanes looking for the Compughar, I realised the lane was just like the lanes of LNJP colony, the neighbourhood where I live. Each lane branches into several others, or many lanes join it^a

As I passed through the lane from the outside, into Nangla Maanchi, my eyes fell on a public call booth (PCO/STD booth) on the right. Next to it was a wall of a house. And on the wall was written, Do not enter; knock, ask permission and identify yourself before entering . On reading the line I was confused ; is this line for the phone booth or for the house? If it is for the booth, then surely it has been painted to attract eyes to it. But if it is for the house? Maybe there are young women in the house, and this line is to stop strangers from just walking in!

Many questions arose in my heart, and I stopped there a while, wondering. Just then, I saw a young woman walk up and then enter the door in the wall. That s when I realised it was probably a beauty parlour. There was no signboard to announce the beauty parlour. Maybe there had been one before, and had been removed at some point of time for some reason. Today, when Nangla Maanchi is being broken, so many people will be passing through that door, from one side to the other. The line ^aask permission...before entering will become meaningless.

No pair of eyes will halt to read the line.

The door will become a thoroughfare.

A Slow Fire Spreads in a Dense Forest

01/04/2005

Rakesh Khairalia

As soon as the fear in the heart settles into the eyes, the wind, space, objects, everything turns into nothingness. Such a sight that makes the heart tremble and break, as soon as it appears before the eyes, the body feels as if it is being bitten by a thousand ants. All kinds of thoughts make their home in the heart.

The work to break houses in the *basera* (dwelling) is in progress. Broken pieces of walls hold shoes, slippers, toys, calendars: left behind by those who lived within those walls. Some more houses are being broken, and people walking around carry in them their whole imprints, knocking at their hearts. But no one has any response to this knocking. Standing

at the corners of lanes, people listen to the sobbing of those whose houses have been broken, are being broken. There is nothing to do, except console. Time has reached a point where it is difficult to leave anything, to seek and discover anything. What was this, if not a series of events meant to annihilate? It is like a slow fire spreading through a dense forest. Looking at it, the thought of doing something boils in the heart. But who can win over time? Fighting continuously, man's self slowly withers. However much you gather, when time comes with its balance sheets, what one has to pay will always be exorbitant. One pays with all that one has. The rest of the extortion will happen later^a

The imprints of those who passed by these lanes, and rested on the thresholds of houses, will slowly fade away. The reveried dancing of human mischief will now disappear. There were times when each morning would come wearing a colourful cloak of rituals and celebrations. It would bring with it attractive faces with smiles that could not be missed. One would see groups of people roaming, celebrating some festival of the everyday. But after today, no one will be seen sharing such happiness with others.

Eyes beholding the scene around them today slowly fill up with fear. On which oasis should people pause to think about their wayward fate? Fate has left them helpless; all they can think now are ways in which they can manage not to leave behind the small things that they have gathered and now possess. So much lies buried in the heart. When it sprouts out of one's mouth, the anger can only be against one's own self.

Has He Left? Are You Leaving^{a,f}

30/03/2006

Lakhmi C. Kohli

1. When someone is executed, they are asked what their last wish is. We were not asked even that. We will inform you of the date, we will keep you informed ^a and look where they have brought us today. You tell us what sense to make of this? First they came and wrote numbers on our doors, and said, This one will not break ; and then they came and painted over the numbers themselves. What are we supposed to do now?^f

2. Two people, breaking their own houses, to each other:

When did he leave?^f

Arre bhaiyya, just last night he lifted a committee [an informal saving system in which a group of people pool in monthly, over a fixed duration, and hand the amount to the lowest bidder each month] for Rs 20,000 in only Rs 5,000. He didn't have any money for hiring a tempo. Having gathered his utensils and other things around him, he sat on them and cried^f.

Yes. How can someone not cry after having lifted a committee at a loss of Rs 15,000?^f

3. Two men in yellow helmets are consistently hitting the wall with big hammers, testing their strength. Next to them, their supervisors sit under a shade, papers in their hands, surveying the lanes with their eyes. Eight or nine people stand near the hammering men.

One man, something bundled in his hand, leans against a nearby wall, watching the hammers fall without blinking. Someone walks up to the group of men and asks, Has he left, the one whose house is being broken?^f

A man in a green shirt replies, No, I don't think he has left still^f. The other man leaves. A man standing near me tells me, pointing to the man in the green shirt, It's his house^f.

4. When my eyes fell on it, the words Oh look, what a beautiful house!^f escaped my lips. The man sitting atop a mound of rubble inside the house turned to stare at me. A woman sitting next to him spoke, her eyes moist: *Arre bhaiyya*, we got it painted just three months ago. The colour was my elder daughter's choice, she searched a lot before she found it. She insisted on this parrot-green colour. And look how we are all scattering now. Where will we go now? There was no notice; and look, the entire dwelling is broken. It was morning, we were drinking tea when we got word that this was going to happen today^f.

5. You want to take this as well?^f

Why not? It is ours^f.

But the tempo is filled, there is no more space^f.

So what? I am not going to leave anything of mine here, whatever you say^f.

You have pulled it apart, but how am I to lift it? Just look at it, it has fallen into the drain^f.

Don't argue, just lift it up^f.

Oh, you won't listen to me^a^f Then, calling out, Hey, Bablu! Just see if it will pass through the lane^a^f

6. Why are you breaking it, you wretched doers of ill? Why are you burying us alive? May your chest rip open, may it be infested with worms. You yourself sit in ventilated rooms and don't let us rest even in the sun^a^f A woman walked up to the cursing old woman and said, They won't listen to you. But we won't go from here. I'm not one to leave because they are here. I have all the documents. Let me see how they touch my house. I will make them tremble, let them try^f. And speaking in this way, she sat down by the door, and kept muttering to herself: I won't let them touch my house. I won't let them break it^f. Sometimes her voice would remain to herself; and at other times it would boil out of her, and reach others.

Nangla Inside Outside

29/03/2006

Priya Sen

How do I begin to write about today? I have hardly begun to absorb it. When we were leaving the Compughar (CM lab) at four this evening, my colleague Prabhat from Ankur, while locking the familiar green door, said, So we have seen this too. In my 13 years of working, I have not witnessed something like this^f.

I had nothing to say. I remained silent.

The Compughar was emptied in the course of the day. The computers, furniture, lights, fans, files, negatives, cassettes, boards, were moved. They were loaded onto a tempo that was standing with many others on the Outer Ring Road. Traffic is usually heavy on the Road. Not today. Today it was slower than usual. To those passing by and going towards Nizamuddin Bridge, it seemed like the settlement on the left was spilling onto the streets. Strange. The settlement had become part of the scenery. And like the scenery, it was not supposed to be spilling so.

Along with the tempos, there were truckloads of policemen in riot gear. Those cane shields they hold always remind me of garden chairs. Maybe that is what they are. And the padding on the khaki slip-on protective vests is so thin that the wearers look like they're in line for haircuts. Yet, sadly, police presence looks like police presence; and it is enough to make thousands and thousands of people do what the police want them to do. In phases. First the shops would go. Then the structures on the outer edges. Then the homes that had a painted sign that said NDS (No Documents Shown), and finally the ones that said P98 (pre-1998). All on different days, starting from today. The *peepul* tree that patterned the light coming into the lab has a way of seeming omnipresent. Today I saw that it was. Looking up from the roof of the lab that is also the terrace of the first-floor residents, the *peepul* tree spread into the sky for miles. On the other side was a three-storied structure that was being broken apart by the people who lived there. The odd thing was that all the activity was so noiseless. If I hadn't followed the hand movements of the two men who were hammering the wall of the house, I wouldn't have registered it. The loudest sound was of the birds. I believe they were on that tree.

There had been a wedding this morning in the adjoining lane. There are two more to go. One tomorrow, and one the day after. The *dholaks* (drums) and the sequined pink and red outfits of the children playing at the video game consoles that were now outside made me wonder how different it might have been yesterday. Not that much. On one of the main roads of the *basti*, the one that also leads to the edge of the Yamuna, there was a sea of things. Inside out upside down and waiting to move in the direction of Outer Ring Road into tempos that would scatter them into a headless city. For now, they formed patches of shade. Walking took much longer than usual, and not only because the things came in the way of one's steps. There was no longer a self-contained line between inside and outside. And perhaps boundaries have something to do with the speed with which one manoeuvres different terrains.

I don't know. Blur.

What Is the City, but a Passage from in Front of Us?

06/04/2006

Lakhmi C. Kohli

1. What is the city, but a passage from in front of us?

When people passed from the road they would say, It is so smelly here. People sit naked

on the road, and shit on the footpath . They would file complaints^a there has been so much investigation into how we live, so much said about how we ought to live. They have broken this place down, the first chance they got^af

2. Just last night, there was a meeting in which our *pradhan* told us, There will be a decision soon [about what is to become of the remaining houses, built before 1998] . But let me tell you this ; there is no decision to be taken as far as the courts are concerned. In the court's papers, this place is not written down as Nangla Maanchi, but as a place where people are living on poisonous fly ash deposits, people who need to be saved^f.

3. What is to be done in the face of such power? Just think about it ; I am the only income-earning member of the family. I have had the floor of the house re-laid twice, got a new door put, and was even going to get beams put to hold up a stronger, heavier roof. Now I am happy I didn't, because then I would have had no money to hire a tempo to transfer my things.

My children, who are studying in the 6th and the 8th standard, have just cleared their exams. I had been hearing for so long that Nangla was going to be broken, I kept postponing getting them admitted into the next class. But when I did, finally, this has come upon us^a

Arre bhai sahab, let me tell you ; my basic cost of living is Rs 2,000 now. I have taken a place in Kale Khan at a monthly rent of Rs 1,200. I have to come here every day. I will have to spend Rs 800 per month in daily commuting. After all, I can't just simply leave this place empty, can I? Who knows when they will come and demolish everything, or maybe they will give us some slip of paper as rehabilitation. Who knows^a?f

4. How can we fight back? Who should we fight against? The charge to fight comes from being able to see the face of the power we have to combat. But that face has never made an appearance before us.

On 27 March, we had walked all the way to Jantar Mantar. Some politicians had also come. They came by car, said something, and left. But a doubt remained in my mind, and the next day as I took my bicycle and headed out to where I work, I saw police personnel in the thousands outside Pragati Maidan. My doubt turned to reality, and I came back home. And I saw they had spread over the entire *basti*.

On seeing so many police where I live, I couldn't decide what to do first ; go and get my children back from school, go and pack my things first, inform others who were not there ^a It is the first time I have seen such a thing.

If they wanted to remove everyone, why didn't they do it all together? What can the few of us left behind do now?f

5. Who knows on what hope everything is resting? There is no stillness in anyone anywhere. As if everyone is roaming around continuously. Eyes and feet don't rest anywhere.

Somewhere everyone is hoping, whatever it is that gets made here, they can at least give us some work in it^f.

6. I have lived here so many years. My heart broke each time I saw someone passing from in front of my door, their things packed. I wanted to call out to them and ask them to stay. Earlier, when someone used to leave, we could at least ask them to come stay in our house for some time. But now circumstances have made the relationship such that it is not in our power to even ask anyone to stay behind with us^af

7. That no one will get any place to stay from the government after this is broken, is something everyone knows. But still, everyone is holding on here. Earlier we were all fighting for a subway or a pedestrian walkway to be constructed over the Ring Road, so we could cross it in peace. But now when there are no people to cross the road, where is the question of asking for a bridge of any kind! Today we cannot fight the one who bears the responsibility of breaking our homes^af

8. Nothing is about to happen. Look at me today. I am sitting in a lane filled with the rubble of houses. So many bricks that it would be impossible to count them.

We have been left to be here with what hope? There is no electricity for the last 12 days. There are so many mosquitoes that people will soon die of malaria.

I can't sleep at night because there is no electricity, and by day I sit looking at the rubble of houses. Now tell me, how can we understand this?

When the park across the road was getting made, and the road was being remade, we were all so happy. Now today this *basti* is being broken and something new will be made in its place. Tell me, how should I understand this, make sense of it?f

9. When doors begin to be bolted in a place in the city, where they would earlier always be open, then how can we think about the city?

It is as if time has disintegrated and collapsed. Eyes look without blinking at heaps of rubble in the lanes, numbers inscribed on walls. But still there is something in this place that will never become quiet. What is that?

My being, my self ; a self surrounded by a place from where my eyes can neither travel into the city, nor make a map of a worldf.

Not This Kind of Freedom

31/03/2006

Yashoda Singh

I had been running from this place, this Nangla. It shows us a deep shadow of our future. A future that will not let go of us. It follows us, gazing at us through different frames.

I have seen people tire of boundaries. But Nangla does not want its freedom today. It doesn't want this open field, where cards can be played by people sitting on top of the dull heartbeats of their own things. They don't want to approach the flowing tap alone, where till yesterday there used to be a long queue, standing in which people used to disperse the fatigue of their day. Today Nangla is like a woman's make-up that has been sullied. Walls

painted with beautiful colours, where till yesterday one could see handprints of henna and oil, are now sites for hammers to make manifest their irritations. Each lane was known by its smells, but today there is so much dust in the air that it is impossible to seek them out. But people stand, giving each other support, not allowing themselves to break apart like the walls. One slipper from a pair has got left behind on the brick lane. A bag filled with flour is hanging on a wall, but maybe no one is hungry. People are leaving, and as they go, they leave behind time, peering from walls, tins and cans, lined on their windows without frames. When a space is being made, the people making it get so tired. Sometimes bricks fall short; at other times, people realise there are no girders, or that the concrete mix is over. Now, as far as the eye can see, there are only bricks.

There is a calm smile on peoples faces, because their fears have become real. There is a search in their eyes for a new dwelling. I heard something from my friends here, which I had never heard, never seen before in my life. As the *basti* was being broken, a young woman was being sent to her new home after being married. Hearing this, my heart went out to her. But then I thought, what if it were the other way round, and a new bride was coming to Nangla with blessings and advice to build a new home? How would she imagine setting up a house on reaching a breaking settlement?

I had once heard that a woman's self finds its dimensions through setting up a home. But there are no homes here today, so what can be said about a woman's self, her being?

Young children are playing in the sand, their dust-laden lashes gathering up dreams in their innocent eyes.

Broken

31/3/2006

Suraj Rai

A woman, packing her household, getting ready to move, said, My son got this made on his birthday. That wall, it is the residue and the result of the estrangement between my husband and his brother. This roof, it was made *pukka* (permanent) when my son got his first salary. Today, each house is retelling the tale of its making before it is broken. The age of a house can only be known when it is being broken.

Some people are unable to say goodbye to their houses. The strong sunlight slips from their heads onto their faces, shining in their eyes. Life on the road outside is normal, as usual. Traffic is passing.

With wishes in their hearts, and exhaustion in their bodies, people are moving towards their own homes. It is difficult to tell whether what they see is a settlement being built, or torn down.

Labourers break the homes, sweat flowing over their bodies. While breaking, they don't see the colour, the beauty of the houses. Rather, they measure and say how little has been spent on making one house, and how much on the other. Inhabitants of Nangla are leaving in search of a new place to live. Who has come from where won't be a question for the new

place that people go to now. Nor will there be questions such as: who lived there before us? Who will live there after us?

These thoughts won't appear till people fashion that new place in their own ways.

There Is No Doubt Now

31/03/2005

Neelofar

Now most houses have been broken. People are breaking their houses with their own hands, and taking out that which may be of use later.

The inner wrappings of the houses, which we decorate for ourselves, are now visible. Like a wall, with several newspaper cuttings of big photographs of heroes and heroines pasted on them. They draw the glances of passers-by at least once.

Now there is a stillness. Maybe because the bulldozers have moved through here, once. And there is no doubt now that they will return, again and again. And now there is no room to resist. A history of so much time that people have carried away with them; and others are yet taking it with them and leaving. And that time which remains is slowly being buried under rubble.

For a handful of days more there will be talk of all this in the newspapers, and then the talk will get over.

Remains

30/03/2006

Suraj Rai

Everyone is lost in the rhythm of a drumbeat today. Someone is busy packing, someone is sitting near the *samaan* (goods). All around, things are being packed, things are being broken. And things are being chosen and picked up from what has been broken. Children are collecting scrap metal and buying ice cream in exchange for it.

Some people are thinking of leaving, others plan to stay here a few days: ice cream sellers, gram sellers, scrap dealers, etc. Some are looking at the road, hope in their eyes. And some are sitting in their houses, their dreams and desires shrinking from around them into their eyes. It takes many kinds of people, many kinds of small environments, to come together and make a *basti*. But in this time of sadness, everyone is looking alike. The same kind of household things, the same kind of wishes and soon they will gather all these and depart for a new place.

After so much has happened, the streets and lanes are still intact. Some children playing, and some women cooking, can still be seen in the lanes. Many people have emptied their houses. But they have left their shadows on the walls. Each wall tells of who lived by it, with it, what kind of stubbornness and desires they lived with. It's as if this remains printed on the walls.

The Weight of Time

29/03/2006

Neelofar

Time has a weight, and people carry this weight with them. For instance, just now I crossed a man who stopped me. His face was wet with sweat from carrying a heavy load, his breathing was heavy, his clothes had become dirty from carrying so many things. He said, Madam, listen^a Is our dwelling going to be broken as well?^f

I didn't understand. He asked his question again. Then he said, We don't have anything ; no proof ; except our ration card, which was made in 1990^f.

Whenever I have spoken with anyone in Nangla, there is a pride in them of having made this place. They say, It was nothing before we came here^f. They say, We have lived here for so many years^f. The names of shops are painted on the walls. So-and-So Tailor, STD Phone, Beauty Parlour, and more. Doorframes and thresholds have been decorated with care and love. Neither the walls, nor what has been painted on them, nor the decoration, and not the time which these hold, can be taken along with anyone today. But doors and shutters can be removed and carried. So hammers are knocking at them. But these sounds are few, and far between.

Disappearance

29/03/2006

Neelofar

Nangla has swollen, and is hurrying today. The police are sitting in long, endless, straight lines in front of Nangla. Bundles with household materials are lying in clusters all over in the space between the Ring Road and where the houses of the *basti* begin.

In the lanes, there is sound of peoples' conversations.

A cot is spread outside a house. A television set, and some bundles tied up in tight knots are kept on it. Between them a man is sitting with some diaries and a telephone in his hand. He is looking at the people passing in front of him.

Some faces are smiling. Maybe there is some comfort in knowing, I am not alone in this^a^f

A boy is standing on top of all the carefully packed, tied-together household things. He is about eight years old. He has a stick in his hand, which he is swinging in the air. He is looking at everyone around him, slowly turning round and round as he watches.

Almost no one is inside their house today. Everyone is outside, sitting at the doors, or along the lanes.

A woman wearing a *sari* is standing, her back resting on the wall of a house. She looks about 45 years old. She keeps adjusting her *pallu* on her head. Her eyes keep shifting, as if searching for something.

A man is carrying things in both his hands: a fan in one and a bunch of tubelight holders in the other. He has anger in his eyes. He speaks suddenly in a loud voice, angry with the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly), with the government. He looks around to see who is

listening to him, who will join him in this.

A 60-year-old woman is standing in the middle of a group of five policemen and saying, Don't do it today. There is a wedding here today. What are you doing?
She looks around at their faces, which remain expressionless.

Reaching Nangla Today

29/03/2006

Nasreen

Many conversations reached my ear when I walked into Nangla. There was a restlessness, and there was hope that someone would put in a word in their favour to higher authorities, so that the *basti* would not have to be emptied today. Even so, people were emptying houses, collecting all the *samaan* in one place outside each house. I walked on ahead and saw a woman washing clothes. How could she not know? How did she look so relaxed? She did not let her restlessness become manifest. A few steps ahead. An old man and two young children were taking all the *samaan* out of their house. Just ahead, I heard the sound of beating drums. Then I saw some rituals were in progress. A lot of people had gathered. The drums beat loudly. A man danced to the drumbeats, in the middle of the crowd. The face of the new bride, being sent to her new home, was awash in tears. I walked on. The lab was around the corner. As I waited outside the lab, the street was very quiet. There was no activity here like there was in the last lane. A lot of people had gathered in the house next door to the lab. The deck was not playing any music today. We met the aunty, who lives in the house above our lab. She started talking to me and told me there was another marriage to take place that night, and the girl had even been through the *haldi-besan* (ritual beautification with turmeric and gram flour paste) ceremony. Aunty was very sad. She kept saying, Where will we go at such short notice?

We talked for a while. The lab was still locked. I started retracing my steps towards the outside. Someone was removing the roof of his house. Two people were carefully packing their china and glass utensils. Everyone was talking. Someone said, What will we do now?
Someone said, Can't the politicians do something?

Someone said, It doesn't look like this *basti* will last any longer.

Someone cursed the police; someone else said, They are only following orders from above;
someone added, They will carry the curses of the poor with them when they leave.
Outside, the road was lined with tempos. A boy stood inside one tempo. He was putting the heavier *samaan* at the bottom. Three young girls walked to the tempo and handed him some more things. The boy took them and quickly put them in their new place in the tempo. People sat in the space between the road and their dwellings, they sat by their *samaan*. Some sat on cots. A voice from behind me asked, What are you doing?

I turned around. It was a police jeep with three policemen inside.

I said, I am waiting for a friend.

What are you doing here?

I told him we had a lab in Nangla Maanchi, and that is where we were going.
 Then I asked, Will Nangla be broken down today?^f
 He said, *Beta* (child), it will not be broken just yet^f.
 I looked at him. I thought, he is giving me false hope^a
 Just then his mobile rang, and he got busy. I moved on.

When One Map Breaks

06/04/2006

Love Anand

A big weighing scale hangs in the middle of the *basti*. A man stands by it, two sacks hanging from his bicycle. He is holding another medium-sized weighing balance in his hands. He is weighing some iron pipes on it. Some men and young children are standing around him. The weight on one side of the balance reads 5 kg. Then he pulls out a few ten-rupee notes from his pocket, and counting them, he hands them to one of the men. This done, he moves through the lane towards the outside.

I met him at the bicycle cart of the *rasgulla* seller. And a conversation began, just like that.

I live in Kale Khan. I have been frequenting this *basti* for two years now. I usually come here twice or thrice a week. People used to sell me some aluminium or iron things that they would collect from where they worked, in different parts of the city. Also cardboard, usually those sections which had got spoiled in the rain or something. I have sat in so many people's houses, drinking tea, buying, haggling, and even lending money!

Sometimes I used to give back quilts or blankets, or cups and glasses in exchange for what they wanted to sell. But now they are themselves selling all that to me^a

Since the breaking of the *basti* has started, there is so much rushing around here. People who would sit me down and chat with me while buying things are busy; packing, standing together in small groups and talking among themselves. No one goes beyond saying hello, beyond the give and take of selling me things. I stand in front of them, but I am invisible to their eyes. They are so lost in the tussle of their own minds, they just pass by, they speak with dryness, and all they want to do is sell their things. After all, who wants to carry so much^a all our backs hurt. But whether their backs break and get smashed to little bits in the effort, they will have to carry their things.

I come here everyday. People are leaving; houses have been broken. The ones that remain are about to be broken. But when one map breaks, another begins to be formed in its place^f.

Objects of Desire

20/04/2006

Neelofar

People decorate their houses according to their needs. Every person has her corner/space/objects in her home, which she decorates with love. For instance, when my

father used to do his sewing work at home, he used to decorate the corner where his machine was kept with posters of heroes, heroines and models. It wasn't important for him to know their names. In the clothes worn in those photographs, he used to see the image of his own work.

Ammi and my sister Shaziya always used to get irritated by Papa trying to decorate his workplace within the home. Shaziya would say, Papa, why do you put all these photos up on the walls ; they deflect the benevolent angels, and I can't offer my prayers, besides^f. Shaziya doesn't let anyone keep anything in the corner of the house where she offers her *namaaz*. She turns over our brother's photo when she prays, and removes any dolls if they happen to be lying there. I think there are two kinds of objects in a home ; those that fulfil our needs and those that express our desires. When we leave our home, we leave behind our desires, and take those things that fulfil some necessity.

At the Crossroads

14/04/2006

Babli Rai and Rabiya Quraishy

Nangla Maanchi stands at the crossroads of life, where the lane, the house, the space, the street corners that had been considered to be one's own for 20 years, are today being snatched away. Who is it that is snatching away the small space that one called one's courtyard, and why? What is it that lies ahead?

Everyone has an answer to this, but everyone cross-checks with each other, trying to get a stamp of consensus from those who surround them. People pass in front of Nangla, speaking quietly to themselves. Everyone knows what police presence means. Everyone knows what an unsettled, partly smashed, exposed settlement means. The lanes can be called lanes only for the sake of naming them something. Now each felled house is a passage of sorts. A broken mirror hangs on an exposed wall. When someone would look at his or her face in it, at some point midway through some action, some movement, some thought, what would the reflection say back to him/her? A thousand stories play back in one's mind when this question arises. A bench is placed in the middle of a broad lane. It seems the bench once served as a shop, once served customers, played a host of sorts. Sunshine filters in through the holes in the tarpaulin sheet, speckling those inside ; three women, two men, and one elderly man. There is a cot, and household things are kept carefully on it, packed. Space is quickly made for us to sit on the cot. Our loud refusals are not paid attention to, and the group of people sheltering themselves under the tarpaulin sheets play out the role of hosts who will not inconvenience their visitors in their own time of stress. Look for yourself, we have nothing left. We are eating what is in front of you. We cannot offer you any food^a Can you do something?^f This was a 65-year-old man, talking to us. Only half his head was covered with hair, and his eyes were red ; as if they had lain awake many nights. I hurried to clarify. Uncle, we have come from the LNJP *basti*, which is on government land. Who knows when it will be demolished^a it could happen any time^f.

Silences

01/04/2006

Rabiya Quraishy

People are filling their hearts with the consolation that some of them have a few more days to prepare themselves before their houses will be broken. When they know they will not be allowed to live here anymore, then why not convince themselves of the fact that this will indeed happen?

Struggling with what is happening to them, they are allowing some slivers of the everyday to resurface. That is why stoves have begun to be lighted again. The *basti* is with us, among us, for a few moments longer.

Someone says, It has passed. What remains of the *basti* will remain. But the next moment someone says, No, it will all be broken.

Time is being relatively easier on those who have documents of proof of residence. That is why, even in a time like this, they are thinking about earning something. Someone is selling groceries, someone vegetables, someone meat. These are now being sold from homes. The shops are all gone. Items are now a little more expensive than they were yesterday, when the bulldozers hadn't come. A small way in which that which time is snatching away from them can be pulled back, recovered. But for others, this is another tax they have to pay, over and above what is already being demanded from them by circumstances.

Today there is silence in Nangla. There is no sound of a house being broken, even. A little girl sitting with others her age says, We will leave from here. We will have a new school. My father has said he will buy me a new pen to take to school. But I won't play there. All of you come to my house, and then we will play! I will give you sweets when you come. Another girl replies, Really? I know you won't give us any sweets.

The first one, there is a bowl in her hands, says, See, didn't I give you all water to drink today? Come to my house and I will give you sweets.

A boy spoke now: *Arre Jhumri*, you will be going somewhere else, and all of us will have homes elsewhere. You will go to yours, and we will go to ours. They will be far away from each other.

Another girl said, *Nakul's* house has just been broken. No one else's house will break now. Mummy was saying our house will not be broken. I will go to school. Everyone will get new, beautiful houses made. My school uniform has become spoiled, now I will get a new one. I was standing a short distance from this group of little children, when I heard a voice behind me. A 17-year-old boy said, The loss has been ours; and it is a spectacle for others. I walked away. I know there is pain in everyone's heart. I know that this is how I will be when this happens with me, and it will.

Someone is saying, They will cut off the water supply in one or two days now. First the electricity, and then the water. If there is no water or electricity, then what will we do here? The state will do anything to make us run away from here. Some policewomen standing by the wall of the temple are talking in muffled tones with each other. If it were up to me, I

would have donated this place to these people. Poor people, where will they go? Another replied, Oh be quiet, you donator! If these clusters of homes had been in your possession, you would not have been standing here. Money is not something one shows off in this way. When you have money, you will change. Then she laughed and said, You know, someone is getting married here. Whenever someone from their family passes by us they mutter something under their breath. They are all burned up from inside. Another said, They should know this is our job. We will do what the government asks us to do. They were chatting, with smiles on their faces, to rid themselves of the boredom they were feeling, to deal with their tiredness.

Everyone in Nangla is being separated from each other. That is why they are going to each other, asking each other how they are, where they are going, asking them their new address; and saying, God knows if we will ever meet again. Even today there were small groups of women at some doors, talking to each other. Maybe they want to spend the leftover time with their friends, smiling, chatting. That is why the small skirmishes one witnesses in the lanes near the taps where everyone comes to fill water, accusations of children's mischief, etc., are not there today. They have got lost somewhere.

Measures

29/03/2006

Shamsher Ali

The traffic is so loud, even the horns cannot be heard.

Their hands locked together behind their backs, some government officials watch people of Nangla gathering up their *samaan*.

An image of an emptying dwelling slowly forms. This terrible image appears before a group of women; and to chase it away, they loudly curse their MLA.

Everyone is in their today, erasing their yesterday. Nangla today is so different from the Nangla of yesterday.

Utensils carefully placed in the house are not there any more, but the thin layer of dust that had settled around them when they were kept there, remains.

There is a queue in front of the scrap dealer's shop. The shop is today an inventory of the *basti*. Cans, boxes, coolers, fans. The weighing balance weighs everything, tipped to one side. It measures everything with its measuring eyes.

From the Rubble

26/04/2006

Jaanu

1. A woman sits, a hammer with a wooden handle in hand, amidst the rubble of her broken house. She picks up one brick at a time, knocks the cement off it, cleaning it, and making a separate pile of cleaned bricks. The heat of the sun makes her sweat, and the sweat halts

like small beads on her face. She stops from time to time, to wipe the sweat away with the hem of her saree. Some beads trickle down to her lips, and her tongue drinks them. She turns her body and drinks water from a small vessel she has kept in the shade. Her lips are moistened.

2. The sun is setting, and it casts a warm red glow on Nangla. Kalaam makes small bundles of sticks. He puts them away carefully. He has gathered them from the rubble of his house the entire day. They will come in use later, when he builds a new house.

3. The breaking of Nangla had stopped, but work continued. Early in the morning, labourers from the MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) came in a truck. The driver parked wherever he found place, and got off to rest. The truck's hinged rear slat was not let down. The labourers placed a ladder from the lane against the truck. One by one, they moved from the truck to where houses had stood before, collecting the rubble. They would heap their metal vessels, coated with dust and cement, with the rubble, return to the truck, climb up the ladder, and unload the rubble into the truck. Two men stood inside, helping them unload.

A Morning Never Imagined Before

01/04/2006

Shamsher Ali

There is a lot that the morning today has lost. Like always, people are making their way to the public toilets, tins filled with water in hand. People reach there, as they do every day. But the queue that is normally there is missing. Everyone recognises its disappearance.

People have not woken up at the time they usually do. And for others, the time of the everyday has become a memory already. It is not present in today's morning. Eyes are waking up to an open sky. People are waking up on heaps of rubble, on top of which they had placed wooden planks to sleep. As they wake up, they also pick up these wooden planks. Sounds travel, colliding on broken walls and bricks. The hand-pump moves up and down, grating at the joints. The laughter of children has not yet risen in the air. Milk from yesterday is being put to boil for tea in utensils washed at the hand-pump.

The question 'What will happen today?' boils in the pan^a

People are washing their yesterdays from their faces, splashing water on them, getting ready for their today. Today the morning is as reticent and halting as it is usually fast and filled with events. Glances filled with love and creased with sadness move through the people involved in creating this environment of the morning. And then, on not finding what they were searching for, these glances become breathless and tired, and retire under the rubble. It is a morning never imagined before, scented with the dust still rising from the homes now lying in heaps.

There is Something the Night Does

26/04/2006

Suraj Rai

Nangla looks different in the morning. There is no electricity, and sounds echo softer than they do otherwise. The echoes of demolition and eviction are also quieter. It looks as if Nangla is finding its way into a new life in the morning.

Nangla is not in ruins. Lives still breathe in it. It is not memories, but the sounds of the present that make this life palpable. Maybe that is why even the traffic passing on the Ring Road slows down as it moves on the stretch along Nangla. It's the second Saturday of the month. Children, some of them dressed in their school uniforms, are playing games in the lanes. The elders all look as if they are preparing to go to work. The lanes do not look restless with the anticipation of a next date with the police, a next round of the breaking of houses.

The NDMC (New Delhi Municipal Corporation) vehicle stands quietly, as household garbage is collected out of Nangla. There is a tap at the mouth of the lane into Nangla. Men and young boys are standing bare-bodied in a queue to take a bath. They are talking among themselves. No one is rushing the other or urging him to hurry up with bathing. Some women, with plastic bags in their hands, seem ready to venture out. When I walked into Nangla, I saw people were sleeping, on cots and on sheets spread on the lane. Bodies are covered with sheets, but the sheets are not adequate to cover the entire body. Arms and legs peep out; old scars as well as new wounds are visible. Passers-by are not disturbed by the still-sleeping people, and the sleepers are not bothered by those who are passing by. The sheets on which they are sleeping lie crumpled from all the tossing and turning at night. Bodies touch the ground beneath. Some people have gathered bricks from the broken houses and made their beds from these.

Fruit and vegetable sellers are doing their rounds in the lanes. Women have set up their stoves and are making tea. A *baba* (mendicant) with a tin icon of Shani Dev (a deity with malefic powers) in his hands goes from house to house, asking for oil and pulses. Seeing him, it feels as if things are as they were before; there are those who depend on Nangla for their sustenance. Huge utensils are being expertly washed in front of an eating joint. Next to this, a young woman sits peeling potatoes, to prepare the afternoon meal. Even though one doesn't hear the sound of the *azaan* in the lanes any more, people still offer their prayers. There is something the night does, which changes things in the morning. Do you think that's because morning is the time to start sorting and collecting all the dreams dreamed during the night?

Was ; Nangla ; Is

13/04/2006

Henna Quraishy and Babli Rai

For the last week, we have been roaming the lanes of LNJP colony with the Cybermohalla broadsheet, *Tha ; Nangla ; Hai* (Was ; Nangla ; Is). We have done this with the previous

issues of broadsheets ; distributing them, standing at different points and reading them out, etc. ; but the experience of this time was, to say the least, different.

We set out in the morning, thinking we would share our own relationship with Nangla Maanchi as we share the broadsheet. And along with that, we thought, we would also share our own understanding of what is going on in Nangla Maanchi right now. Babli, Saifuddin and I headed out towards Bismillah s lane, which is a very famous lane of LNJP. It is broad, with two vegetable shops, two tea stalls, a doctor s clinic and a workshop amidst all the houses on either side of the lane. It is always crowded. We began by giving copies to everyone who lives there, in their homes. Someone said, I can t read Hindi^f. So Babli volunteered to read it out. She said, It s about Nangla Maanchi. Nangla is a big *basti*. The settlement has now been broken down, just like that. We have been going there, and along with our friends at the NM Lab, have brought out this publication^f. Oh, then go ahead and read it out to me^f. Then listen^f. And with that, she began to read the first page aloud.

The hurried passing of people came to a halt. People became quiet, listening intently. A big circle of people gathered around us. Whoever would hear the name Nangla would halt to listen. Everyone wanted to know what was happening there, how the houses were broken down. If someone would stand up and start saying something, others would stop him, saying, First listen to what she is reading. You will understand its value when your house is broken^a^f. An old man standing behind Babli was looking at her as if he was reading the broadsheet himself. As the texts continued to be read out, a lot of women gathered around. It seemed a strong thread tied everyone to Nangla Maanchi, as if everyone was searching for themselves in the texts.

As soon as Babli finished reading, a man said, That is how it would have happened. It has been written well here. It must have been so difficult to figure out what to do at a moment like that^f. Then he said to Babli, *Beta*, you have shared with us a good thing. At least now we know how things stand there, what everyone s position there is. This is how it will be here as well, soon. But tell me, where exactly is this place?^f I said, Uncle, it is near the Yamuna. It is much bigger than LNJP and a lot of people lived there^a. Uncle, do you know, so many houses have been broken but people are still living there. It is difficult to know what hope they are living there with. They sit there with all their things outside in the lanes, hoping someone will come and say either Here, you can go to this new place now , or This is your home, live in it ^f. The elderly man said, What will this publication do? Will it help us understand something? Will it take us to some kind of answers for what is going on here?^f

I said, No, uncle, perhaps it will not give us any answers. But we are all trying now to understand what is going on in the city right now^a. None of us are too far away from Nangla Maanchi and its present condition. Even in the midst of the situation they are all in, people are trying to understand themselves, their lives, this city, and the State which is doing all this^f.

The elderly man said, Maybe our government will also read this and think a little^a. This publication will also travel outside Delhi, and to other countries as well, won t it^a? I think something like this will happen here also. This place is also quite big. A lot of police will come. None of us will leave peacefully. We had fought a legal case once for 437 houses

here, and had even won the case. We have been given a time of five years, and a promise of a plot of 600 square metres. So I suppose we will be all right, and there is nothing too much to worry about^a Do you know, all of Delhi will be emptied out in this way by 2010^af I said, Uncle, all of us will be made to leave from here, this place will be broken^f. He said, We will leave if we are made to, but we insist that we should be given the same amount of space as we have here right now^af

But uncle, who owns this land?^f

I asked him this question because he is very old, and has been running a vegetable shop here for a very long time now, and so might have specific information. He said, *Beta*, this land was a burial ground, and it is we who have made it inhabitable. Now the state is becoming greedy. This city reminds us of the old story ; dark is the city, and foolish its ruler . This government won't last. It has taken other countries' methods as its own policy. It is a way of turning us into slaves once again. But what can we do, this is the way of the world^af A woman said, When the settlement at Shakur ki Dandi was broken, it was winter. I had gone to buy some oil. People had to sit outside their broken houses in the cold. They were sitting with their children at the bus stop. They were not given any compensation. No thought was spared as to where they would go. I only hope this is not what becomes of us as well. It is for good reasons that this is called the age of *qayamat* (apocalypse), the age when everything will be destroyed^a For us, the calamity will strike when our houses will be broken. And think about Nangla, where calamity has already struck, and people are facing it^f. The elderly man said, Yes, it will be terrible then. And think about everyone who lives here on rent. Where will they all go? And where will we go? We also have nothing else, nowhere else to go^f.

Aslam uncle said, Yes, but Kauser's brother-in-law came from Mumbai yesterday and said their house was broken, but they were given good compensation ; of Rs 7 lakh^f. I said, He can't be telling the truth^f. Aslam uncle said, But what will he gain by lying to us? Maybe there is some other reason why any compensation, let alone so much, would be given to him. Maybe it was his own land? I only pray to Allah that we get a roof over our heads^f.

When we left from there, people were still talking among themselves. And even as we walked, many asked us for copies of the broadsheet. There was a feeling of closeness in how the broadsheet was being requested. People would stop, ask for it and quietly walk ahead, reading it to themselves.

One Evening

16/04/2006

Shamsher Ali

As the evening spreads, streetlamps that line the roads begin to cast their light, and cars on the road begin to race on twinkling headlights. The evening at LNJP is radiant. People have wrapped up their work, and with time on their hands, have come out onto the main road, searching for their friends, and respite from the April heat. Those employed in

workshops have dried their brows and have come out to lighten the lines forming on their foreheads. People passing by on the road continue to halt at, and move on, from the shops according to their needs.

Everyone holds their everyday tightly in their fists, careful that they don't lose their grip, lest it slip out.

Red sand from the shop nearby flies in the air with the gusts of wind propelled by each passing car. Everyone stands along the road as if on a railway platform, in small groups, exchanging stories from the day with each other. In the middle of this blowing wind and shared environment is a road divider, on which one can see a stove, boxes filled with utensils, a suitcase filled with clothes and some cans in which grains are stored. And in the middle of all this sits a 60-year-old man, like a king on his throne, intently watching the early evening environment being woven before his gaze. His moist eyes look around swiftly. The face is taut with age. His flowing beard and protruding veins make the expression on his face strong. The skin on his hands is stretched and hardened from years of using heat to give shape to things. He is wearing a *kurta pyjama* and his head is covered with a prayer cap. His eyes tug at you again. It is as if he is holding back and quietening the rustling sound of time in them. He pulls a small case from his pocket, takes out some tobacco and rubs it on his palm. His posture remains the same.

Mohammad Ahmed is from Nangla Maanchi. He is famous for his self-sufficiency, skill and capacity for labour; he could if he wishes, dig a well each time he is thirsty, and then leave it for others to quench their thirst from it. Each morning he leaves from his home in Nangla with a sack of plastic bottles on one shoulder, a sack of clothes on the other, and a stove in his hands. He is an expert in mending broken plastic buckets and tubs, and is known for this skill in localities in Old Delhi. Despite his age, he has held his dwelling together in the face of uncountable difficult moments.

Today, a couple of words inscribed on his door have expelled him from his home of 25 years. Today he sits on the road divider, opposite LNJP colony, his possessions of 25 years gathered around him; things he had collected from the time Nangla was still settling into the city, and the *basti's* air was still saturated with fly-ash.

Today he is sitting on the road divider, waiting for his sister's son to come and take him to a new place where he will begin again the process of making a home.

Documents Mean Nothing^af

07/04/2006

Suraj Rai

He was wearing an orange shirt; his uniform. He was removing the rubble left over after the houses had been broken. He has been doing this manner of work for the last seven years.

I only had to ask him, What is it that you do here?^f He started to talk.

Their houses break, and people like us get cursed. No two fingers in a hand are of equal length^a

If you look to the east, you see the sun rising, and if you face the west, you see the sun in the evening. Our head officer looks to the west and imagines it is going to be a new morning^a

So much is changed. And so many dwellings break. As far as I know, there will be some games in this city in 2010, because of which all this breaking is happening^a

I am concerned about earning my daily wages. And in any case, none of this will stop by my willing it. My survival is based on doing what I am told to do^a

This space was never theirs in the first place!

Documents mean nothing! They are pieces of paper that are like chains ; one just gets tied by them, and keeps chasing those who one thinks will pay heed to documents^a They are pieces of paper through which those below you in the hierarchy are made to dance to your tunes^af

Objects

06/04/2006

Jaanu

1. A basket woven from bamboo hangs from a nail on a wall. It is covered by black plastic, tied to it with a thin rope. The oil stains on the rope remind one of what the basket was used for ; maybe to contain and carry oily *chaat* or condensed milk. But today it stands upright due to the support of the wall, its pride and calmness hanging on the nail.

2. Posters pasted on walls used to hide the shortcomings of the walls. But today they are unable to hide themselves from the outsiders' gaze. Each word written on them can be read by any passer by. Till yesterday, people used to go into the house and say, 'You have decorated your walls so beautifully'. But today people have left them hanging there, alone, and gone away.

3. A shirt lies in a basket, swinging in the air. It has no owner today. Three of the four walls of the house have fallen. Just then some photographers came and started taking photos of everything. They didn't even spare this lonely shirt. Its location now became its pose. Someone's mistake is today becoming someone's memory.

4. Some lanes in Nangla are such that you can see many different kinds of stoves ; plain, round, stoves with a dual form, stoves that can be used as ovens. And all these have been made with one's hands. A woman sits cooking on a stove with two shapes ; on the round part, she has placed a cooker, and on the square one, she is making *chapattis*.

5. A garland made by stringing together various kinds of flowers hangs on an idol. Its flowers have wilted. It still spreads fragrance around the idol; the god is still smiling, though there is no one to pray to it any more.

6. Small houses of glass, which arrest any passing footsteps. Feet halt before the fine cut of the glass walls of the glass houses. They move closer to see clearly the play of light and

shadow dancing on the walls. Eyes watch in rapt attention the hands that make this fine piece of work. The one who stops witnesses a splendour, and the one who makes them either earns some money, or some appreciation for the fine work.

7. Nangla Maanchi is looking a little lost now. Nothing shines. There is no sound. If a leaf falls from a *peepul* tree, it seems as if it is the sound of someone's advancing footsteps. But the leaf falls, and is lost in the ruins of the houses that remain standing.

8. When evening falls, a strange pall descends over Nangla. With all the houses empty, mosquitoes have also become homeless and roam freely, entering the houses still standing. Someone says, 'We are left with nothing. We will live the remainder of our lives here, and we will die here'.

9. Houses marked P-98f stand proudly against the evening sky. Inside, people sit with their things gathered together, and with a hope that they have been named 'another plot of land somewhere in the city'. Things do not sit sparkling in places they have become accustomed to. People search for something, but then realise it has been packed, and say, 'Who needs it! We can do without it!' There is a silent wait for the police and the demolition crews to reappear. We will first shift our things out when they come. Then we will fight with them. So what if our blood flows? There is no way we can return to our village now; how can we possibly show our face there after this?

10. In people, there is still a belief that the law is on their side. And so they stop themselves from emptying their houses. They sit with their documents ready, even as they know these papers are meaningless today. But there is a trust, a hope, which does not let them despair.

Tiny Fragments

20/04/2006

Lakhmi C. Kohli

The grey cement ground that is used for morning prayers had been scrawled with various shapes for playing games, using red chalk. The green doors of the classrooms were shut and locked with identical locks. Some doors were not locked though; and one could peep through them to catch a glimpse of what they may have looked like when they were still in use. The dust-infused air had settled in the classrooms. Piles of dust lay accumulated in the corners. One could only try and imagine what the environment in the classroom would have been like. Maybe all the desks from all the classrooms were collected here, in this room, when they were first purchased. Today, apart from the neat rows of desks here, several had been piled up for storage. Crumpled sheets lay in drawers without knobs.

It was completely silent, and so it was difficult to imagine what conversations would have sounded like during free periods. Is this a school about to break for vacations?

A man is sitting on a bent chair in front of an empty classroom, his eyes running from spot

to spot over the corridors and the locked doors. Behind him, in the empty room, a thin carpet (the kind spread to seat many people) lies in one corner. In another corner lie a pile of new schoolbooks, tied together with a plastic string.

Maybe this classroom is not used for children to study. Maybe that is why there are a few big desks in it, and no chairs to sit. I could hear the man's voice. Desks: 200; broken, 50, in proper condition, 150; fans: 25; broken, 3, in proper condition, 22; cupboards: 2; locks: 17; broken, 5, in proper condition, 12^af

And so he continued, jotting things in his file. He would write something, and then look around, wondering what it was that he hadn't counted. I too wondered what all that could be. He had already counted the windows, window frames, stationery.

It was breezy where he was sitting, right at the edge of the corridor, in the shade. I looked again at the desks in the classroom. Each desk had an imprint of his hand made in the dust, as he would have touched each desk, walking along as he counted them. He would have counted a row of desks, and brushed the dust off his hands by rubbing them on his trousers. His trousers would have been marked by a thousand fingers of dust.

I walked towards him. I wanted to know what gaze he cast on the school when looking at it through its objects alone. He sensed me approaching, looked up at me and smiled. This was his permission for me to begin talking to him. I asked, Sir, do you know where you will be shifting to? Where the school will shift to?f He stretched his body as if to relax his muscles and said, Yes, we do know that now. But we can't shift till the *basti* is broken, and till all the students have been issued their transfer certificates. They will be issued till the 29th of this month. All these things will be shifted before we shift.f Where is the school shifting?f Nearby, to another school.f Do you have to make an inventory of all the things?f What can I say! The government doesn't spare anything. If it were up to the government, I would also have to count all the bricks. How does it matter to the government if this becomes my difficulty!f

He said all this in one breath, without thinking twice about what he was saying. He just kept looking at his papers and speaking. Just then a teacher called out to him from inside a classroom, Listen! The transfer certificates register has run out here. Bring another one, and bring the stamp as well.f He replied, Of coursef, and started muttering under his breath. Now I will have to count the registers again, and make a new list. If there are any scratch marks on any list that has to be submitted, the teacher in charge won't sign it.f He walked away, muttering.

He was gone three minutes, and the silence around me seemed to deepen. I saw there were other people in the school. They appeared and disappeared through doors. The man returned. Perhaps our conversation amused him. Yes, so what were you saying?f He sat down as he said this. How many students are there in the school?f I'm not so sure. There are 60 students to a class. The school is till the 5th standard. There are three sections to each class. So there must be roughly 1000 students in all.f His arms were crossed in front of him, and he nodded his head as if to affirm to himself the correctness of his calculation. I said, It would have been a bigger problem if you had been required to count all the children in this school, like you have had to count things.f

Stamping his foot on the floor, he replied, directing his eyes at the teacher issuing transfer certificates, *Arre*, we have records of that. But if we were asked to count, we would have been in trouble. When we go out for a picnic or something, it becomes difficult to keep count of 40 students. And to count them all! *f* Is everyone being sent to the same school? *f* That's what we've heard, as of now *f*. And all these things also have to be shifted to that same school? *f* No. By the grace of God, that school has everything it needs. All these things will be sent to the office, to be issued out to that school if they need something, or to be passed on to a new school *f*.

There was a brief pause, and then he said, Isn't it strange! If they had to break this place down, why did they have to give all the facilities of school, dispensary, water, electricity? It is so unsettling to have students come to get their transfer certificates issued, and not be able to answer their question about where to gain admission now *f*.

His eyes shied away from mine as he said this, as if he was answerable to me in some way.

Did you have a favourite student? *f* I asked him. He laughed and said, They are all dear to me *f*. But there must have been someone who you liked so much that you wanted her or him to sit on the first desk of the classroom? *f* Yes. Basheer. He had come two days ago. He has just finished his third standard, and moved into the fourth. He stood first in class. When he came to collect his transfer certificate, he was wearing his school uniform. He had a notebook in his hand, and his hair was oiled and neatly combed. He came and stood at the door. Looking at him, one would think that the school is only closing for a break, and will resume after a while. Everyone kept looking at him, all the teachers, I mean. To ask him if he had come to get his transfer certificate would have been like a blow to the image he presented before us. And the school did not have the courage to look into his eyes to ask him, Have you come to study today? Basheer was quiet. But then he spoke after a few minutes, asking for his certificate. I gave him his certificate and, patting him on his back, said, Study hard. He left, and all of us kept talking about him for a long while after that. Time seemed heavy then *f*.

Our conversation came to an end here. I left, thinking, How does someone console himself, in the breaking, dissolving moulds of life? Who is to know in what form something will make an appearance before us, and where we will fit into it? So that he doesn't break, each person has made himself up in tiny fragments, so he can push himself from one place to the other, piece by piece, and not shatter because of a jolt *f*.

Parchee-Tent

06/05/2006

Jaanu

People who live in Nangla used to spend their money to set up tents and decorate them with flowers. This decorating had a special meaning to it; the preparation for a wedding. Two days before the bridegroom's *baraat* (wedding procession) arrived, the thresholds of homes used to be decorated with glitter.

A tent was also set up on the day Nangla was broken. This lone tent, set up for MCD officials, was outside the locality. But inside, there were many more tents. The tent outside indicated the uprooting of thousands of homes; the tents inside had been set up to celebrate the union of lives through marriage.

As a guest, I too had entered a tent of celebration the day Nangla was being broken. It had been set up along the wall of a park opposite Nangla. It had a main door through which people were entering, smiling, humming to themselves. Different things to eat had been placed on round tables inside the tent. There were salads with sliced onions, long pieces of cucumber, carrots and radish, cabbage leaves, chopped tomatoes and pieces of lemon. Fresh plates sat one on top of the other on one side. Spoons were spread in a fan-like formation.

A young woman was going to be married in Nangla, and everyone waited for the arrival of the bridegroom with his guests in buses and Maruti cars. Chairs covered with white cloths stood waiting in rows. Plastic cups filled with water were kept on one side. Outside, the settlement was breaking; but inside, there weren't many signs of fear.

Several days after the first round of breaking of the *basti*, another tent was set up outside, in the park. As soon as it was set up, a turbulence arose in people's hearts, just as a storm arises in an ocean, sending ripples which turn everything upside down.

The tent was set up across the road from Nangla. There was a simple difference this tent had from other tents; it was not for the general public, but for policemen and the Rapid Action Force.

On seeing the tent, Nangla started buzzing. One voice said, The tent has been set up to give away *parchees* (slips for land allotment)^f.

As soon as the word *parchee* was heard, rumours began to float.

Someone said, Don't get a *parchee* cut on your name. They are fooling us. There is a Supreme Court order staying further demolition. There will be a hearing on 9 May. If that is the case, then what will be issued today will be a fake *parchee*^f.

Someone said, The *parchee* they are issuing has neither the house number, nor the name of the place they are being issued for. Don't take these emaciated, forged *parchees*^f.

Someone said, There are no plots on the land for which they are giving away the *parchee*. And that land is barren. It was used to grow lentils, and those fields are all dug up and rocky. The water is salty. Not even birds drink it. You will have to spend Rs 50 each time you want to travel from there to the city. It will take you two hours^f.

Someone said, How will we live there? There is no one to listen to us^f.

People left in small groups to go to the tent and see it from up close. They would return and say, They are making fools of us^f.

Someone said, I have newspaper cuttings about the court orders, which have Nangla's name in them.^f People began to look more carefully at the newspaper cuttings than at the tent.

All the community workers and local leaders of Nangla were listless. No one knew what was about to happen. Everyone spent time looking and thinking about the tent.

No one knew how to proceed. Then a young woman went to the tent and figured out what was going on. The DDA (Delhi Development Authority) had asked for the tent to be set up.

The police and the RAF (Rapid Action Force) were given today's date to be present. The tent had been set up, and the police and force had come. The DDA officials had not made an appearance.

There was uncertainty among the police on how to proceed.

Residents of Nangla kept returning to the road and gazing at the tent till it was removed and the grass on which it was set up was visible again.

And with that people abandoned their vigil, and went away. Maybe if the tent had continued to be there, at least some people would have forgotten their hunger and thirst and continued to sit there, looking at it. Many more rumours would have spread. Someone would have said, You have to give Rs 5,000 for the *parcheef*; someone would have put the figure at Rs 7,000; and someone would have said the DDA will have to be paid Rs 2 lakhs in instalments for the house they will construct for us. Someone would have said those whose houses were made before 1998 will get 12.5 square feet of land, and someone would have placed the figure at 18 square feet. But when the tent disappeared, everyone shifted their thoughts to 9 May, the day of the next court hearing.

Every tent has a different form and appearance. There are feeding-others tents, welcoming-politician tents, Ramlila-performance tents, watching-plays tents, praying-to-gods tents, performing-religious-ceremonies tents, gathering-to-go-on-hunger-strike tents, miscellaneous-occasion tents. But the happiness or joy brought by any of these tents pales in comparison to the fear that can be evoked by a *parchee*-tent.

The Edges of a Road

11/04/2006

Lakhmi C. Kohli

The excitement of seeing the tent and the worry of seeing the rubble of homes reside together in everyone's minds.

On the other side of the road, the empty tent swayed in the wind.

That edge of the road was lined with chairs set in patches of shade cast by trees, which seated RAF and Delhi Police personnel.

The Supreme Court had stayed the demolition till the 9th of May. Then why this tent, and why now?

An RAF *jawaan* sat inside the tent, behind a desk covered with a white cloth, watching people gather on the other side of the road. His name is Mahinder Singh [name changed]. Singh has been working with the RAF for a few years now, but has been unhappy with his work the last two months.

A small group of people, who felt they could ask the RAF *jawaans* and the Delhi Police personnel questions directly, walked into the tent, stood before the desk and, heads lowered, asked, Sir, why has this tent been set up here?

Removing once again the sheet of the tent that kept blowing onto his head from behind him, Singh replied, This tent, you see, was set up today, you see, to give *parchees* for the new place. We have come; we came at 9:30 am; but the DDA people have not come, nor can

we see the tent people anywheref.

Sir, when were you told you had to be here?f

See, it s like this. We are told, You have to go on such-and-such date for your duty. Go with so many men . So we arrive there. Actually this is not our work, you know. But these days the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) is busy in election duties. So we have been deputed here. Our work is to maintain peace. Our work is when there is a strike, there; when there is an earthquake, there; when there is a politician s lecture, there; so that no one gets excited, you know, in case of a riot, there, etc. Actually, I do not know much about today. You can ask one of the Delhi Police peoplef.

Look, the DDA personnel have not arrived. But the tent has been set up. There is a riot in peoples hearts across the road because of the tent. Look^af

About this tent, it is like this, you see. The tent-*wala* must have been told to set it up here on such-and-such date. He is not concerned with anything beyond that, you see. He is only concerned about his booking. He will remove the tent when the time of the booking is up.

But this riot in peoples hearts that you are talking about: who is to know what will come of it? We have been seeing it for two months now. This is not our work, after all. We have been going all over the city the last two months.

Just last month we were on duty at this other place. You see, we reached there at 10:00 am, and they began the breaking at about 11:00 am. Some people had removed everything from their house. But some hadn t, and bulldozers were moved on to their houses as well. You see, it is not possible to reason and say, Why not finish with another house, one which has been emptied, and then return here? They just shut their eyes and moved the bulldozer on. There was some poor woman, who had a shop with plastic items like buckets and mugs. Without looking at her things, the demolition crew broke everything. Inside, there was one mug stuck within another. As they were smashed, about Rs 2,000 fell out. We said, Take your money. If it gets into someone else s hands, you will lose even this . But she kept crying.

You must know about the fire in Pushta. We were sent on duty there. We were at one end of the *basti*, but the fire was at the other end, about two kilometres away. By the time we could reach that end, the fire had reached us. So much just got finished there, I cannot even tell you. It was difficult to watch. This is not our work, you see, but we have to witness all this.

Our power is only this much: to pull someone s hand with force. We hold sticks and batons, but only to frighten. We have bombs, but they only make noise and do nothing moref.

Singh sat in the tent, looking across the road, and recounted these stories one after the other. He probably didn t want to, with the other side of the road in his view, but the images kept appearing. Maybe the path he had taken when he joined the RAF had got lost in the last two months. This is not our workf, he kept saying. Maybe he was uneasy with the gaze his uniform attracted, his conscience uneasy under that gaze.

The pairs of eyes watching him sitting alone in the tent will evoke his form to frighten their children at night, if they refuse to sleep. Along with changing the meaning of things, eviction also changes the form and shape of things, and the mirror in which one looks at oneself.

Our work is to maintain peace, not to break housesf, he said, as he tied his shoelaces, and

moved to group his battalion and then leave for the Tilak Nagar police station. The tent was now empty. The numbers on the other side of the road continued to increase. Time moved slowly, and sounds became denser, and denser.

Showpiece

08/05/2006

Neelofar

Two kinds of utensils are bought for a home ; some are for everyday use, and the others are used for decoration, as showpieces.

The first kind of utensils are used and washed everyday, they bang against one another, clink, jingle, clatter. They make space for themselves; claims such as this glass is mine, that plate is his around them confirm this.

The second sort of utensils, showpieces, are put away carefully, as soon as they are brought into the house. They are not paid attention to on a daily basis. Their relationship with the world is one of exclamation: Wow! It's so lovely!

It seems Delhi is distancing itself from the whistle of the pressure cooker, the heat of the stove, the coolness of the *matka* (earthen water pot) half buried in the sand, the shared clatter of the glasses, plates and cups; Delhi is becoming an expensive, beautiful, fragile showpiece, which will be picked up and put away carefully somewhere. The praise-filled exclamation of the beholder will be all that can touch it, and one will have to think twice before approaching it and touching it bodily.

I heard from someone that Delhi will be made such that the President of America will be able to stand at its centre and see six gates simultaneously ; Delhi Gate, Ajmeri Gate, Turkman Gate, Mori Gate, Kashmiri Gate and India Gate!

What is important is not the truth of this statement and others like it, but the current climate of re-structuring of the city is making space for such sentences, and they are gathering in density. People live in a place for years. During this time, they inscribe the diary of their minds with texts about the journeys of their lives. The pages of these diaries are sometimes cloudy, sometimes dense, and at times some of the pages are intensely personal.

People pass through many ups and downs in lives, without ever bringing words about them to their lips. But today a wind is blowing in which these internal diaries are opening by themselves; the pages are flipping, spreading their scent. The wind is so powerful that the fragrance spreads freely, drawing everyone to itself.

Fragrance can't be seen; it simply spreads in the atmosphere. It needs a form to contain it, so it doesn't spend itself^a

When the long duration for which people have lived somewhere is recounted, the time in such a narration feels heavy and sharp. But when the person who has lived somewhere for many years is asked for evidence of this time and his existence in it, this makes him lighter, more fragile than the lifeless papers that are supposed to be his proof.

One has to think anew the question: What is living , dwelling f?

Ration cards, voter I-cards, identity cards, passport?

Or is it those relationships because of which not only your own home, but your entire lane, calls you *amma*?

Is Delhi Shrinking?

08/05/2006

Azra Tabassum

Instead of being built further, Delhi is shrinking. Inside, it is becoming as constricted as it seems open from the outside ; which lets people believe that its space is their own.

This city is what it is because of its crowds, its density. When the number of people reduces, how will this city breathe? Will this city become a place where, rather than living in it, people merely spend their lives in it?

Hearing of yet another settlement being broken and emptied out of the city, Sumi began to traverse image after image of the city in her mind's eye. She remembered an encounter on Juhu beach in Mumbai, with a man who was pushing the swing on which her child was seated. He had asked her, Are you from Delhi?

Yes. But how did you know?

The man re-tied the cloth wrapped around his head, smiled and said, I have a dream that I will go to Delhi one day.

Sumi realised she had encountered her city afresh, and with an intimacy.

She asked, Where are you from?

Pushing the swing, his lungs straining from the effort, he said, I too am from Delhi.

Then why don't you come to Delhi? Sumi said, looking at her child who was holding the swing in fear of falling off.

Mumbai is not like Delhi, he said. Mumbai calls you, but doesn't let you leave. I had come here to work. I had thought it a city of films; I thought money would shower everywhere. But that's not how it is. A world is as difficult to live in, as it looks beautiful from afar. I married here. I have a wife, kids. Now it is difficult to leave. Only someone who has a lot of money can leave Mumbai. Delhi is a city of people with hearts. Anyone can come to Delhi, and dream dreams of a home, a place of one's own.

These words appeared and reappeared in Sumi's mind. She thought, When those spaces which invite and give place to people from outside won't remain in Delhi, then how will Delhi be called a city of people with hearts?

Sumi recalled her friend Sandhya *bhabhi*, whose sister-in-law Shobha lived in Nangla Maanchi, near Pragati Maidan. But now she had come to LNJP with her family, to live with Sandhya *bhabhi*.

Shobha had been married into Nangla. Her daughter was now 15 years old.

When Shobha sat sobbing, remembering the days she had spent at Nangla, Sandhya *bhabhi* had consoled her, Don't be anxious, Shobha. You have all the documents for the house in Nangla. The government will give you a place to live. You will be able to remake your universe.

Shobha's voice was heavy as she said, No, *bhabhi*, documents are of no use any more. They won't do anything. I have documents and receipts of every single thing; big and small; that I have bought while in that house. I had kept them carefully, knowing I would need them one day. But they are all useless now^f.

Sandhya *bhabhi* had come to Sumi's house and was recounting this conversation. Sumi was finding it difficult to believe this. She removed her child from her breast, adjusted her clothes, opened the cupboard in which she stored food. She pulled out a packet with old and new documents and started showing them to Sandhya *bhabhi*.

Look, I have a passbook from 1981. I used to deposit one rupee every month in my son's name. A man used to come here every month and take the money. I had done this only five to six months when he disappeared. I didn't get any money, but didn't mind that; after all, the passbook is proof I was here at that time. And look at this aluminium token^a^f

She drew out such things one after the other and showed them, as if she was sharing with Sandhya *bhabhi* the fragrance of an old rose that she had dried and saved.

Sandhya *bhabhi* said, I too have all this. But they are no good any more. They are useless^f. No, *bhabhi*! How can that be? What will we do?^f

That is something I don't know. I can't understand. LNJP will also be broken, sometime or the other. What will happen to us who have nothing except a hope that lingers on these documents? But everyone is forgetting that it doesn't take long for a space to get made with a new name, wherever people go^f.

With this prediction, Sandhya *bhabhi* connected Sumi's fate to her own, and left. Alone, Sumi thought to herself, If this place was not intended for humans, why did they give us rations, oil, sugar, rice? If we are not inhabitants of this city, why do they make us vote for them? Why did they allow us time to create relationships? Have I lived here this long to become a guest in my own house?^f

Then she spoke out loud, We have bought this place^f. She picked up each document as if it were a fragile flower, and just as a human is wrapped in his burial shroud, she folded them all in a cloth and replaced them in the cupboard, carefully, as if they didn't belong to her and that she was only their custodian.

In her heart, she kept thinking, Is Delhi shrinking, instead of being built further?^f

Conversation with a Journalist

15/05/2006

Rakesh Khairalia, Lakhmi C. Kohli, Shamsheer Ali, Jaanu, Dilip

At the time of demolition, and in talking about demolition, what gets lost is the making of the space. People who live in Nangla have come from Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, etc. They came into the city, and perhaps were already living somewhere, when in order to save their rent, they started to make a new space instead.

People do not settle somewhere to take over land.

A *basti* is given ration cards, voter I-cards with trepidation, and a long time after it has been settled in; a *basti* is not recognised as a settlement for 8-10 years after it first begins.

How does a *basti* get made?

Someone comes from a village. They may come alone, or with a friend. They may be the first to come to the city from their village, or they may know someone in the city from before. Someone may come to the city just to be with a friend.

They work and save some money. Then they start to make something of their own. And it is after this that they call their family.

A space is not a flat plane, devoid of power dynamics and negotiations. Just making a place to live is not enough. A protracted process of negotiation with the state begins. Claims are slowly made ; for infrastructure ; for electricity, for water. Local politicians play an important role in this.

That is when people begin to say, *Chhani-chhani jagah se basti sajna shuru hui*² (A no-place was decorated and a *basti* began to form...).

It is not a lane which is made first, but a *mahaul* (environment). People, who have come from different places begin to get to know each other. It is not like a resettlement colony, after all, where people who have known each other for a long time are relocated to a lane in a settled colony.

When a space is being settled in, what is made is a door after a door. Over many years ; 10, 15, 20, 30 ; after the labour of day and night, the state of a home changes from *chhappar* (temporary shelter) to *chhat* (roof).

As door after door is put up, people who were strangers to each other slowly make a neighbourhood.

This is the stubbornness to live, to make, to dwell.

This disappears in a demolition. The transformation from *chhappar* to *chhat*, from being strangers to becoming a neighbourhood, disappears. It becomes about the *zameen* (land), which is occupied .

You may discover it when you walk in the lanes of Nangla ; even today, when you will see lanes in which only one house has been broken, and lanes in which all houses, save one, have been demolished.

This is what we mean by Nangla's Delhi.

Space and Land

11/05/2006

Neelofar

Shadows are bound to form and follow us around as the sun's youthfulness increases. Settlements in Delhi today are not untouched by the demolition of Nangla. They also feel the scorch of the orbit of time that Nangla has passed through, and continues to, still.

For instance, LNJP also perceives its future through Nangla.

Earlier, when there would be talk of the removal of LNJP colony, people used to shun it away as a rumour. My mother used to say, 'We have been hearing this for so long now, since the time this colony was beginning to be settled. We used to hear this even when we

had come here, 17-18 years ago^f.

But today, even though there are no rumours about the dwelling being broken, somewhere people have accepted that this space is not theirs any longer.

Now, every Sunday, some women get together and go out in search of land, and meet property dealers. It is mostly women who go out to look for land. Perhaps they think in their minds that men/their husbands go out to work during the day and return only in the evening; but women and children stay in the *basti* the entire day, and so it is important that women know and gauge the ways of living, amenities, etc., of a new place.

When the women return, tired, in the heat of the afternoon, they bring a lot with them, and share it with everyone at home and in the neighbourhood.

Land is available at Rs 1400-1500 per sq. ft. there^f. The area is in wilderness^f. Some people have begun to live there^f. There are too many mosquitoes there^f. This is the number of the bus that goes there.^f There is also a mosque there^f. There is a school, too, there^f. Electricity is a problem there^f.

They gather and bring with them many facts, much information of this kind, from a single encounter. The decision of whether one should go to live there is a decision that will be taken later, by the entire family.

Many people have bought plots of land elsewhere. Some people have begun to get houses constructed on them. Some have even begun to go and live there, giving over their houses in LNJP on rent. They come back here now only occasionally.

But people who live in LNJP have not given up on LNJP completely.

How can they? It is in so many years that they have made this space theirs.

This relationship is like the mixing of milk and water, which are not only difficult, but almost impossible to separate. But to the government, this relationship seems to be one of a fly fallen into milk, which can be removed with a finger at any time, whenever^a

A Place to Dwell

10/05/2006

Shamsher Ali

Inside all those places termed illegal^f by the government, there lies a different story. The government plants the stake of its stamp on a place ; This is government property . And in response, we place our small bundles of receipts and papers gathered from past time till today. But the world moves on the basis of documents, which these receipts are not.

The law is a shape-shifting thing, and thus brings about different kinds of changes. Appeals made by *bastis* being uprooted are squashed with the state's words, You are illegal occupants. To give you the land you are living on is like returning money to a pickpocket^f. People who dwell in these places still try to figure out what the word *basti* means, away from the locking, unlocking chains of government bodies and legal pronouncements. People have been thrown into turbulence ever since the order to demolish Nangla came, and even as the demolition began, people kept saying, Nangla invites everyone. Those who

come are not interviewed on their arrival.

The city is shrinking from within, and we are being thrown out, cast away. But for the woman who seldom crosses the threshold of her house, the city is expanding. The city's form has grown in terms of what is seen and what is heard. Women who used to sit at the threshold of their houses and talk about their neighbourhood now bring the city into their conversations; what is being shown on television, what is appearing in newspapers, what is the latest in politics, etc. With changing time, Nangla Maanchi has spread into the city. Today the city has a new outline, and Nangla has become an important link in this. The air of Nangla is in everyone's breath. Seasons change. The city's appearance takes delight in these seasons, and changes according to the season. But the non-seasonal change in the city, through violent gusts in the form of demolitions, demand a shift in understanding.

Some people, like rickshaw-pullers, who think of parts of the city as their own garden, are swept away in this change.

Those who hold power look at the city from above: they are different kinds of sculptors of the city. The meniscus of the allegedly immiscible fluids; legal and illegal; has broken its surface tension; contents have begun to splash out of the cup.

The city disowns and expels its own dwellings.

Today Nangla tussles with all this; as hundreds of trucks, carrying thousands of households separated from each other, roam the streets of the city, looking for their own places to dwell.

Here and Elsewhere

10/05/2006

Lakhmi C. Kohli

In the last few days, things have been made and unmade. There have been doubts about what it is that is being made, what is being unmade, and questions about what the new plan is, after all. A dwelling is broken, and along with it, its time, weave, modes of living; questions about life are ripped apart and replaced with turbulence, tension, and a realisation that even the eye of the law has stopped casting its gaze upon the *basti*.

A dwelling: in which people live in self-evolved modes, in which each moment gives rise to a new fable about life, and in which eyes dream living dreams:

What should be painted on this wall?

The roof drips, I should get a new roof laid.

The legs of the cot have to be removed and placed under the cupboard.

A new window in the house will be good, as it will mean sounds will flow into the room all the time.

Dreams like these, and so many more; including those that are not limited to one's own courtyard.

But the law draws new lines and makes new boundaries every moment. Those who live in cities live in these maps that are drawn everyday; the lines of these maps clash with the

lines of their lives.

It is not that people who live in cities don't redraw maps themselves. Whenever difficulties are faced regarding water, electricity or sewage, old and new lanes are dug up, and technicians of the city, who can be found along different lanes, are called upon.

Today, once again, the enterprise to remake the city has begun, but this time on a large scale. New, beautiful maps and plans are being drawn up. These are, perhaps, impossible to take to some conclusion without evictions and demolitions.

But no matter how many new maps and plans become possible in this way, demolitions pierce and sting countless lives. Demolitions distil these lives from walls, lanes, brick-paved pathways and doors.

Does the State's imagination of the city of the future include a demand for an understanding of the time lived in the city by the inhabitants of a *basti*? Nangla has already given up its first half to the city.

The remainder, not as yet fully unmoored, tries to distract itself from decisions about its future, and continues to light its stoves the same place they have been lit for years, and where, passing through the soft membrane of the curtain, conversations, events, happenings of the streets, lanes and roads of the city have been transformed into stories.

In Nangla today, there are pockets where people have left, and taken along with them even the sounds of the place. The three days of demolition were a new aspect of the city for Nangla Maanchi. Inhabitants have scattered to different parts of the city, in different colonies where new relationships, new contexts, new neighbourhoods, new stories will now have to be born.

Memories will be made, and memories will be dispersed.

It seems as if demolitions have not removed pages from the diaries of lives, but added many new blank pages to the diaries, for something new to be inscribed on them. But how will the city include this in its own understanding and perspective?

For people who remain in Nangla, demolitions are being lived in instalments. Everyday, the same question appears in everyone's mouths, When is the next date? Those who have the capacity or the power to gather a hundred others around them, busy themselves in guesswork, planting some poles of reassurance.

What is about to happen? asks each pair of eyes.

These questions, and the desires they withhold, ask that the future take them elsewhere.

What will this elsewhere be?

How will the law, and the city, inscribe this in its imagination?

Entering Ghevra

01/06/2006

Lakhmi C. Kohli

As far as the eye could see, there was flat land. Not a single structure could be seen. Silence reached the ears. Criss-crossing lines made by tractors, cycles and feet stretched from below my feet and travelled on. The land is dry. Divided up like small plots for farming,

it has soaked up any water that might have been present.

Eyes search for a trace of the city, search for a semblance of a house-like structure. The ears seek a trace of human voice.

But perhaps this place has none of these.

The city is far away from here. One can see it faintly at the edges of one's vision. But sounds lose their power to traverse such huge distances, and to enter here. This is a corner of the city. Buses which one is used to seeing so filled up in the city, roam empty here. Three-wheelers roam with their small drapes closed. To reach Ghevra, one has to turn from the road onto a path which probably doesn't lie on the route of any bus. Shops line the road, stopping where the bus ends its journey. If you live in the middle of Delhi, no three-wheeler driver will probably agree to bring you here.

Even the road that connects Ghevra to the city lies outside the domain of the city.

From the main road, the three-kilometre stretch must be crossed on foot. The same path leads you into Ghevra, and out of it. Vast levelled terrain lies on either side, grounds which used to be fields on which lentils were grown. Patches now lie burnt. Looking around, I panicked for a while at the thought of what I would say if someone were to ask me where I had come from. Would I say, I have come from Delhi?

I wondered about resettlement colonies; when people are uprooted and resettled far away from their homes, they are pushed out of the city. It is said they are not part of the city, their dwellings are not the city. On relocation, they must begin the process of transforming the land they are moved to, into the city.

Slowly they will build it, and make it part of the city. People keep bringing the city into their courtyards through their conscious will.

Postcard from LNJP

05/06/2006

Saifuddin

From up above, in the sky: I think I may fall, what if I do! But what have I to fear?

God has, after all, made me to fly.

But some of the others like me live the fear more intimately, and have begun to shy from flying. Perhaps it is the sights that they see which makes them fearful.

I remember one such sight. Brick after brick was falling apart. It was a heart-wrenching sight. From the sky, people gathering and moving from where they live, and in so doing they looked like us, like a flock of birds. Constantly on the move.

But when their abode is destroyed, what is it that they go out to seek?

Is it for a new home? A new set of troubles and woes?

A new identity? A new recognition or regard from the city?

But here, up above in the sky, from where I watch them, I feel all of this will not be possible^a

And so the pigeon flew over the city, amidst its flock, and looked down and watched. What

did the city look like from that height?

Can you see that family?^f

Yes, of course!^f

In their condition, do you think they will be able to settle down and make a home again?^f

My sense is, maybe not. Otherwise, would they have hung around in the park the last three days?^f

So are they contemplating spending their entire lives in this park?^f

No, you fool! They are the few hopeful ones, waiting for someone to arrive and reassure them. Or perhaps they are organising means to return to their village with the entire family. They will return to the time they had left behind and spend the rest of their life in their past. Maybe they will never return to the city.^f

But a majority of them will stay in the city. Then how will the city get cleaned? The government says Delhi will become clean when slums are removed. But people are scattering, and they will resettle in the city, only in a new location. Maybe when they don't have a home they will not think of creating a family. Maybe this is the government's population control drive!^f

Again, stupidity from you! Habitats may be cleared, but not peoples' will to make life in the city! And you, who can see the earth and the open sky, can't you see how much pain there is in being uprooted and being separated from your neighbourhood?^f

You think too much. Why can't you just concentrate on what you have to do!^f

And you talk like a caged bird who sleeps away his time. Take a friend's suggestion: open your ears once in a while, listen to what people say about how they make their life, what is going on in their neighbourhoods, listen to them talk about their sadness, and how they express it.^f

I see no need to do all this! Maybe I will some day, if I get the time. And you, friend, will do well if you look ahead of you. See how much grain is on that roof there!^f

Let's fly faster. We have got left behind from our flock. Someone may think we are pigeons from his flock, and summon us to his roof. Come, let's fly back into our own flock^a Hey, all of you, wait! We are right behind you, and are flying faster to join up with you^a^f

The City and Its Landscapes

14/04/2006

Rakesh Khairalia

There is a restlessness in the city. Each day people roam the streets with their inner landscapes on roads that are like the whorls on our fingertips; they cannot be removed, or erased.

From where one stands, one can sense the present, and look back and see time that has passed; but no corner of time to come can be seen. Ahead, there is a sky. The sky flows into time that is yet to come, it is the intimation of things to come.

Time watches everyone through the frames it makes with its different weights and scales. Nothing is hidden from the eyes of time.

What does the mirror, which reflects the everyday thoughts of living, of the capacity and will to live, say to us? We live in the same place, in the same time, with similar hungers, similar hopes and desires^a then how is it that the directions we want to proceed in become so contrary to each other?

What are these divergent streams emerging from the various sounds and conditions of our lives?

When we pause somewhere to look at them closely, they look back at us with slanting gazes. When we look from above, they seem deep. When we look from in front, their time seems eternal, endless.

When we make images from what was, and what is, in Nangla, are we a thread entangling itself in other threads? Or are we like a waterfall in a mountain, cutting through rocks, paving some kind of a way, a path? After one has seen so much, what is it that can be called normalcy in life?

Who is normal?

You, or I, or someone else?

Today there is anger in peoples eyes, a fire in their hearts, a defeat on their foreheads. The one causing all this is in front of us, but there is nothing to be done about it.

What kind of a situation is this?

Hindi blog postings translated by Shveta Sarda

LINKS

<http://www.sarai.net/nm.htm>

<http://www.nangla-maanchi.freeflux.net> (Hindi)

<http://nangla.freeflux.net> (English)



Collaboration: The Dark Side of the Multitude

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER

Collaboration is one of the guiding terms of an emergent political sensibility in which certain collectivities and mutualities are being redefined as modes of affectual politics. Collaboration, literally, means working together with others, especially in an intellectual endeavour. The term is widely used to describe new forms of labour relations within the realm of immaterial production in various domains. Despite its significant presence, however, there is very little research and theoretical reflection on what it implies. What is at stake is the very notion of establishing a new understanding of the term together, within a contemporary dynamic of working together.

The problem is that most often collaboration is used as a synonym for cooperation. However, it will make more etymological, historical and political sense to elaborate the actual differences that shift between the various layers of simultaneous meaning.

In contrast to cooperation, collaboration is driven by complex and often diverse realities rather than by romantic notions of a common ground or commonality of interests. It is an ambivalent process, constituted by a set of paradoxical relationships between co-producers who affect each other.

1. An Indecent Proposal

As a pejorative term, collaboration stands for willingly assisting an enemy of one's country, especially an occupying force or a malevolent power. It means to work together with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected; for instance, the French Vichy regime in the 1940s, which collaborated with the German occupiers.

This traditional view of collaboration as a traitorous cooperation with the enemy provides a counter to what management theory since the 1980s has been promoting as teamwork : the act of subordinating one's autonomy to the specific regimen of a group. This has conceptually replaced the classical role of the foreman as the disciplining force. Efficiency is increased not by repression but by the collective identification of small groups of co-workers.

Meanwhile, various research studies have shown that people working in teams often make wrong decisions, especially when the task involves solving rather complex problems. These findings come as a surprise, since rapid technological development and the global availability of intellectual resources increase the pressure on individuals to exchange knowledge within and between groups.

Teamwork often fails because of the banal fact that the internalised modes of cooperation are characterised by the opposite of the impulse and ability to share knowledge: in order to stay ahead of competitors and produce unique work, one has to hide relevant information from others. On the other hand, it also refers to the fact that joining forces in a group or team increases the likelihood of failure much more than that of success. Awkward group dynamics, harmful externalities and bad management practices are responsible for the rest.

2. In Praise of Mutuality

There is more and more evidence to show that working together may also happen in unexpected ways. Instead of exerting the alleged generosity of a group, where individuals are supposedly committed to the pursuit of solidarity, it may actually be the reverse: a brusque and (in principle) ungenerous mode, where the more individuals follow their own agendas, the more mutually, sometimes inextricably, dependent they become.

Such a paradox of friendship without friends^f, as Jacques Derrida pointed out in a different context, characterises contemporary forms of collaboration. Collaborations are black holes within knowledge regimes. In today's environment, it can be argued that collaboration produces modes of expression that are hollow, ostentatious, offensive. Collaboration is not undertaken for sentimental reasons, charity or efficiency, but is motivated by pure self-interest.

For instance, claiming transparency within what is called the information society reveals as hypocrisy: the emerged and yet-emerging new information and communication technologies replace conventional strategies of walling off knowledge from the public. These technologies rely on intellectual property regimes and digital rights management to grant or refuse access to immaterial resources through operations in real-time. Consequently, the concept of individual rights has vanished, as well as the logics of inclusion and exclusion. Such legislation applies to both virtual and real space, to the domain of knowledge production as well as to national/political borders.

Within the ethos of a postmodern control society, collaborations are all about exchanging knowledge secretly and through the evasion of borders. The escape agent,

human trafficker or coyote^f ; as such individuals are known along the US-Mexican border ; supports undocumented border crossings by those who want to make it from one nation state to the other without the mandatory documents. The coyote as an allegory of collaboration: always on the move, only temporarily employed, nameless and anonymous, constantly changing faces and sides.

The coyote's motivations either remain unclear, or do not matter at all. This figure is a postmodern service provider par excellence: there is no trust whatsoever, and this does not even create a problem. The conceptual insecurity of those involved overrules the eventual financial aspects of the collaboration, and triggers a redundancy of affects and precepts, feelings and reactions. Those who do not need the coyote's support are hunting and demonising it; those who depend on the coyote's secret knowledge and skills are longing desperately for it.

Nevertheless, the collaboration between the coyote and the clandestine immigrant exemplifies the certain amount of illegitimacy intrinsic to any form of collaboration. It stands for the attempt to regain autonomy amidst the coercions of a society of control.

3. Singularities

While cooperation is undertaken between identifiable individuals within and between organisations, collaboration expresses a differential relationship that is composed of heterogeneous parts defined as singularities : out of the ordinary, in a way that produces a kind of discontinuity and marks a point of unpredictability, even if deterministic.

This is revealed in post-Fordist production, affect industries as well as networking environments in general. People have to work together in settings where their input, productivity, efficiency, performance and labour power cannot be singled out and measured as discrete variables, but in each case refer to the specific work of somebody else. One's own manner and intent in terms of production may be individual, but may be generated, and often also multiplied, in networks that are composed of countless distinct dependencies constituted by the power to affect and to be affected.

With regard to such a mode of excess, one that is essentially beyond measure, collaboration may be compared to the mathematical definition of singularity: the point where a function goes to infinity, or is in certain other ways ill-behaved.¹ The concept of singularity once more distinguishes collaboration from cooperation. Furthermore, it refers to a notion of emergent precariousness that can be seen as the crisis that goes along with this rupture, or seen as the transition from cooperation to collaboration, in terms of modes of working together.

The meshings of voluntary impulse, motivation, enthusiasm and creativity, as well as of immense pressure, ever-increasing self-doubt and desperation, are transient, fluid and appear in multiple forms ; but they all are symbolic of the state of profound insecurity and precariousness that becomes the blueprint for widespread forms of occupation and employment within society in general. It reveals the other face of immaterial labour, one that is hidden behind the persuasive rhetoric of cooperation, networking, and clustering.

In contrast to cooperation, which always implicates an organic model and some transcendent function, collaboration is a strictly immanent, wild and illegitimate praxis. Each collaborative activity begins and ends within the framework of the collaboration.

Despite its manifest multiple affiliations, it is self-bounded, self-directed, self-fulfilled; it has no external goal and cannot be decreed; it is pure intransitivity; it happens, so to say, strictly for its own sake.

Cooperation necessarily takes place in a client-server architecture. It follows a classic narrative structure, in which there is a coherent assignment of every part and its relation to another. Collaboration, on the contrary, presumes rhizomatic structures where knowledge grows exuberantly, laterally, transversely, tangentially, and proliferates in an unforeseeable manner.

The relationships between collaborators can be understood through analysing peer-to-peer formation. Peer-to-peer computer systems (P2P networks) appeared on the internet in the 1990s and revolutionised the conventional distribution model. Such networks are designed to enable people, who do not know each other and probably prefer not to know each other, to exchange immaterial resources such as computing time or bandwidth, as well as relevant content. These pragmatic, anonymous relationships between users are based on a powerful irony embedded within this mode of sharing, even in a strict mathematical sense: due to free and exact digital copying, the object of desire is not divided but can be infinitely multiplied.

Finally, it must also be pointed out that collaborations are authentic sites of revolutionary potential. They are driven by the desire to create difference, and to resist the autocratic imperatives of conventional modes of production. They provide a means to overcome scarcity and inequality in the digital domain, and they imply commitment to the struggle for creative freedom everywhere. Above all, collaboration carries immense social potential as an emancipatory mechanism, for the actualisation of the unlimited creative energy in the multiplicity of all productive practices.

NOTES

1. Mathematicians frequently speak of whether a mathematical object x is a number, a function, a set, a space of one sort or another; x is well-behaved or not. The term has no fixed formal definition, but can have fairly precise meaning within a given context.

In pure mathematics, well-behaved objects are those that can be proved or analysed by elegant means to have elegant properties. In both pure and applied mathematics, well-behaved x also means not violating any assumptions needed to successfully apply whatever analysis is being discussed. Euclidean geometry, for instance, is better behaved than non-Euclidean geometry; spaces with integer dimension are better behaved than spaces with fractal dimension, etc.

The opposite of well-behaved x is usually termed pathological x . A pathological example is one whose properties are (or should be considered) atypically bad. The term pathological x is subjective and context-dependent, and its meaning in any particular case lies in its interpretation by mathematicians, and not within the subject matter itself. In mathematical analysis and set theory, those searching for the

pathological are considered experimentalists and iconoclasts.

Pathological examples often have some undesirable or unusual properties that make them difficult to contain or explain within a theory. Three important historical instances of this are: a) the discovery of irrational numbers by the ancient Greeks; b) the discovery of number fields whose integers do not admit unique factorisation; and c) the discovery of the fractals and other rough geometric objects. At the time of their discovery, each was considered highly pathological. Today, each has been assimilated and explained by an extensive general theory.

Pathological objects are typically perceived to be aberrant; on the other hand, they are properly defined mathematical objects. Therefore, this bad behaviour can simply be seen as a contradiction with our intuitive picture of how a certain object should behave.

See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well-behaved>; www.PlanetMath.org

We Lost the War. Welcome to the World of Tomorrow

FRANK RIEGER

Losing a war is never a pretty situation. So it is no wonder that most people do not like to acknowledge that we have lost. We had a reasonable chance to tame the wild beast of universal surveillance technology, approximately until 10 September 2001. One day later, we had lost. All the hopes we had, of keeping the big corporations and security forces at bay, and of developing interesting alternative concepts in the virtual world, evaporated with the smoke clouds of the collapsing World Trade Center.

Just right before that, everything looked not too bad. We had survived Y2K with barely a scratch. The world's outlook remained mildly optimistic despite all the millennial projections. The New Economy bubble gave most of us fun things to do, and the fleeting hope of plenty of cash not so far down the road. We had won the Clipper-chip battle,¹ and crypto-regulation as we knew it was a thing of the past. The waves of technology development seemed to work in favour of freedom, most of the time. The future looked like a yellow brick road to a nirvana of endless bandwidth, the rule of ideas over matter, and dissolving nation states. The big corporations were at our mercy because we knew what the future would look like, and we had the technology to build it.

Those were the days. Remember them for your grandchildren's bedtime stories. They will never come back again.

We are now deep inside the other kind of future, the future that we speculated about as a worst-case scenario, back then. This is the ugly future, the one we never wanted, the one that we fought to prevent. We failed. Probably it was not even our fault. But we are forced to live in it now.

Democracy is already over.

By their very nature, the Western democracies have become a playground for lobbyists, industry interests and conspiracies that have absolutely no interest in real democracy. The democracy show must go on, nonetheless. Conveniently, the show consumes the energy of those that might otherwise become dangerous to the status quo. The show provides the necessary excuses when things go wrong, and keeps up the illusion of participation. Also, the system provides organised and regulated battleground rules to find out which interest groups and conspiracies have the upper hand for a while. Most of the time it prevents open and violent power struggles that could destabilise everything. So it is in the best interest of most players to keep at least certain elements of the current democracy show alive. Even for the more evil conspiracies present around us, the system is useful as it is. Certainly, the features that could provide unpleasant surprises, such as direct popular votes on key issues, are the least likely to survive in the long run.

Of course, those in power want to minimise the influence of random chaotic outbursts of popular will as much as possible. The real decisions in government are not made by ministers or the parliament. The real power of government rests with the undersecretaries and other senior non-elected civil servants, who stay while the politicians come and go. Especially in the bureaucracies of the intelligence agencies, the ministry of the interior, the military, and other key nodes of power, long-term planning and decision-making is not left to incompetent mediocre political actors who are elected more or less at random. Long-term stability is a highly valued thing in power relations. So even if the politicians of states suddenly start to be hostile to each other, their intelligence agencies will often continue to cooperate and trade telecommunication interception results as if nothing has happened.

Let's try for a minute to look at the world from the perspective of one such 60-year-old bureaucrat who has access to the key data, the privilege of being paid to think ahead, and the task of preparing policy for the next decades. This is what he might foresee:

First: The place of paid manual labour will be eroded further by technology, even more rapidly than today. Robotics will evolve far enough to kill a sizeable chunk of the remaining low-end manual jobs. Of course, there will be new jobs; servicing the robots, biotech, improving design, experimenting with nanotechnology, etc. But these will be few, as compared with the number of jobs today, and require higher education. Globalisation continues its merciless course and will also dictate the export of a lot of jobs of the brain-labour type to India and China, as soon as education levels there permit it.

So, Western societies will end up with a large percentage of its population, at least one-third, or possibly half, the number of employable people having no real paid work. There are those whose talents can be cheaply bought elsewhere, those who are more inclined to manual labour. This would include not only the undereducated, but also all those who simply cannot find a decent job anymore. This part of the population needs to be pacified, either by Disney or by Dictatorship, most probably by both. The dimensions of the unemployment problem severely affect the ability of states to pay for social benefits. At some point it becomes cheaper to put money into repressive police forces, and to rule by fear rather than put the money into payouts to the unemployed population and buy the necessary social

peace. Opportunities for criminal activity become more attractive when there is no decent job to be had. Violence is the unavoidable consequence of the further degradation of already unequal social standards. Universal surveillance might dampen the consequences for those who remain with some wealth to defend.

Second: Climate change increases the frequency and devastation of natural disasters, creating large-scale emergency situations. Depending on geography, large parts of land may become uninhabitable due to drought, flood, fires or plagues. This creates a multitude of unpleasant effects. A large number of people need to move; crop and livestock production shrink; industrial centres and cities may be damaged to the point where abandoning them is the only sensible choice left. The loss of property such as non-usable (or non-insurable) real estate will become a frightening truth. The resulting internal migratory pressures towards safe areas will become a significant problem. Properly trained personnel, equipment and supplies needed as a response to environmental emergencies will have to remain on standby all the time, eating up scarce government resources. The conscripted segments of national armed forces may be formed into disaster relief units, as they hang around anyway with no real job to do except securing fossil energy sources abroad and helping out the border police.

Third: Immigration pressure from neighbouring regions will rise in all Western countries. It looks as if the climate-related disaster will initially hit areas such as Africa and Latin America the hardest. The economy there is unlikely to cope any better than the Western countries, with globalisation and other problems ahead. So the number of people who want to migrate at all costs from there to somewhere inhabitable will rise substantially. The Western countries need a certain amount of immigration to fill up their demographic holes, but the number of people who want to come will be far higher than this. Managing a controlled immigration process according to demographic needs is a nasty task, one where things can only go wrong most of the time. The inevitable reaction will be a Fortress Europe: serious border controls and fortifications, frequent and omnipresent internal identity checks, fast and merciless deportation of illegal immigrants, biometrics on every possible corner. Technology for border control can be made quite efficient once ethical hurdles have fallen.

Fourth: At some point in the next decade, the energy crisis will strike with full force. Oil will cost a fortune, as it will no longer be possible to extend production capacities economically in order to meet the rising demand. Natural gas and coal will last a bit longer, a nuclear renaissance may dampen the worst of the pains. But the core fact remains: a massive change in energy infrastructure is unavoidable. Whether the transition will be harsh, painful and society-wrecking, or just annoying and expensive, depends on how soon the investments in new energy systems start on a massive scale as oil becomes too expensive to burn. Procrastination is a sure recipe for disaster. The geo-strategic and military race for the remaining large reserves of oil has already begun, and will cost a vast amount of money.

Fifth: We are on the verge of technological developments that may require draconian restrictions and controls to prevent the total disruption of society. Genetic engineering and other biotechnology as well as nanotechnology (and potentially free energy technologies if

they exist) will put immense powers into the hands of skilled and knowledgeable individuals. Given the general rise in paranoia, most people (and for sure those in power) will not continue to trust that common sense will prevent the worst. There will be a tendency to create controls that keep this kind of technology in the hands of trustworthy corporations or state entities. These controls, of course, need to be enforced; surveillance of the usual suspects must be put in place to ensure knowledge of potential dangers in advance. Science may no longer be a harmless, self-regulating domain but something that needs to be tightly controlled and regulated, at least in the critical areas. The measures needed to contain a potential global pandemic from the Strange Virus of the Year are just a subset of those needed to contain a nanotech or biotech disaster.

Now, what follows from this view of the world? What changes to society are required to cope with these trends, from the viewpoint of our 60-year-old power-broking bureaucrat?

Strategically, it all points to massive investments in the domain of internal security.

Presenting the problem to the population as a mutually exclusive choice ; between an uncertain dangerous freedom and an assured survival under the securing umbrella of the trustworthy state ; becomes easier the further the various crises develop. The more wealthy parts of the population will certainly require protection from illegal immigrants, criminals, terrorists; and implicitly also from the anger of less affluent citizens. And since the current system values rich people more than poor ones, the rich must get their protection. The security industry will certainly be of happy, eager assistance, especially where the state can no longer provide enough protection to suit the more privileged.

Traditional democratic values have been eroded to the point where most people don't care anymore. So the loss of the basic rights that our ancestors fought for not so long ago is at first happily accepted by a majority that can easily be scared into submission. Terrorism is the theme of the day; others will follow. And these themes can and will be used to mould Western societies into something that has never been seen before: a democratically legitimised police state, ruled by an elite free from accountability; a state committed to modes of total surveillance, made efficient and largely unobtrusive by modern technology. With the enemy (immigrants, terrorists, catastrophe victims, refugees, criminals, the poor, mad scientists, strange diseases) at the gates, the price that needs to be paid for security will seem acceptable.

Cooking up the terrorist threat by apparently stupid foreign policy and senseless intelligence operations provides a convenient method to initiate the establishment of a democratically legitimised police state. No one cares that car accidents alone kill many more people than terrorists do. The fear of terrorism accelerates social changes and catalyses the efforts to build the structures and tools required to suppress the coming waves of trouble.

What we today call anti-terrorism measures is the long-term, consciously planned preparation of those in power for the kind of world described above.

The Technologies of Oppression

We can imagine most of the surveillance and oppression technology rather well. Blanket CCTV coverage is reality in some cities already. Communication pattern analysis (who talks to whom at what times) is frighteningly effective. Movement pattern recording from cell phones, traffic monitoring systems and GPS tracking is the next wave that is just beginning. Shopping records (online, credit and rebate cards) are another source of juicy data. The integration of all these data sources into automated behaviour pattern analysis currently happens mostly on the dark side.

The key question with regard to establishing an effective surveillance-based police state is to keep it low-profile enough to let the ordinary citizen feel protected rather than threatened, at least until all the pieces are in place to make it permanent. The first principle of the 21st-century police state: All those who have nothing to hide should not be bothered unnecessarily. This goal becomes even more complicated, since with the increased availability of information on even minor everyday infringements, the moral pressure to prosecute will also rise. Intelligence agencies have always understood that effective work with interception results requires a thorough selection between cases where it is necessary to do something, and those (the majority) where it is best to just be silent and relish the covert pleasures of voyeurism.

Police forces in general (with a few exceptions), on the other hand, have the duty to act upon every crime or minor infringement they get knowledge of. Of course, they have a certain amount of discretion already. With access to all the kinds of data listed above, we will end up with a system of selective enforcement.

It is impossible to live in a complex society without violating a rule here and there from time to time, often even without noticing it. If all these violations are documented and available for prosecution, the whole fabric of society changes dramatically. The old sign for totalitarian societies ; arbitrary prosecution of political enemies ; becomes a reality within the framework of democratic rule-of-law states. As long as the people affected can be made to look like the enemy-theme of the day, the system can be used to silence opposition effectively. And at some point the switch to open automated prosecution and policing can be made, as any resistance to the system is by definition terrorism . Social development is paralysed; the rules of the law-and-order paradise can no longer be violated.

Now, emerging from the claustrophobic reality tunnel of said 60-year-old bureaucrat, we have to ask ourselves: where is hope for freedom, creativity and fun? To be honest, we need to assume that it will take a couple of decades before the pendulum will swing back in the direction of freedom, barring a total breakdown of civilisation as we know it.

Only when the oppression becomes so directly overwhelming will there be a chance to reclaim the more progressive ideologies of earlier times, as people will have no choice but to resist and revolt. But as long as the powers-that-be continue to manage the system smoothly and skillfully, we cannot make any prediction as to when the new dark ages will be over.

So what now?

Move to the mountains, become a gardener or carpenter, search for happiness in communities of likeminded people, in isolation from the rest of the world?

The idea has lost its charm for most who ever honestly tried. It may work if you can find eternal happiness in milking cows at five o'clock in the morning. But for the rest of us, the only realistic option is to try to live in, with, and from the world, regardless of how oppressive it has become. And we need to continue to build our own communities, be they virtual or real.

The Politics and Lobbying Game

So where to put your energy, then? Trying to play the political game, fighting against software patents, surveillance laws, and privacy invasions in parliament and the courts can be the job of a lifetime. The advantage is that you will win a battle from time to time, and can probably slow things down. You may even be able to prevent a gross atrocity here and there. But in the end, the development of technology and the panic level of the general population will chew a lot of your victories for breakfast.

This is not to discount the work and dedication of those of us who fight on this front. But you need to have a lawyer's mindset and a very high tolerance of frustration to gain satisfaction from your efforts, and everyone does not have this quality. We will always need the lawyers.

Talent and Ethics

Some of us sold our souls, ideas, skills, imaginations: maybe to pay the rent when the bubble of technological creativity burst and the cool and morally easy jobs became scarce. We sold our head to corporations or the government to build the kind of things we knew perfectly well how to build, things that we had sometimes discussed as an intellectual game, never intending to make them a reality. Like surveillance infrastructure. Like software to analyse camera images in real-time for movement patterns, faces, licence plates. Like data mining to combine vast amounts of information into graphs of relations and behaviour. Like interception systems to record and analyse every single phone call, e-mail, mouse-click in the web. The means to track every single movement of people and things.

Understanding what uses one's work can be put to is one thing. Refusing to do particular work because it could be put to use in ways that cause harm to other people is something else entirely. Especially when there is no other good option with regard to earn a living in a mentally stimulating way. For those of us caught in this dilemma, most projects by themselves were justifiable, of course. It was not that bad or no real risk. Often the excuse was, "it is not technically feasible today anyway, it's too much data to store or make sense of. Ten years later it is feasible. For sure.

While it certainly would be better if the surveillance industry died from a lack of creative minds within it, the more realistic approach is to keep talking to those of us who have sold our heads. We need to generate a culture that might be compared with the sale of indulgences in the earlier dark ages: you may be working on the wrong side of the

barricade, but we would be willing to trade you private moral absolution in exchange for knowledge. Tell us what is happening there, what the capabilities are, what the plans are, which gross scandals have been hidden. To be honest, there is very little that we know about the capabilities of today's dark-side interception systems, following the initiation of the Echelon system.² All the new surveillance technology that monitors the internet, the current and future use of database profiling, automated CCTV analysis, behaviour pattern discovery and so on, is only known in very few cases and as vague outlines.

We also need to know how the intelligence agencies work today. It is of highest priority to learn how the we-would-rather-use-backdoors-than-waste-time-cracking-your-keys methods work in practice on a large scale, and what backdoors (methods of bypassing normal authentication or securing remote access to a computer, while attempting to remain hidden from casual inspection) have been intentionally built into or left inside our systems. Building clean systems will be rather difficult, given the multitude of options to produce a backdoor ; ranging from operating systems and application software to hardware and CPUs that are too complex to audit fully. Open Source does only help in theory, and who has the time to really audit all the sources, anyway^a

Of course, the risk of publishing this kind of knowledge is high, especially for those on the dark side. So we need to build structures that can reduce the risk. We need anonymous submission systems for documents, methods to clean out eventual document fingerprinting (both paper and electronic). And of course, we need to develop means to identify the inevitable disinformation that will also be fed through these channels to confuse us.

Building Technology to Preserve the Options for Change

Today we are facing a unprecedented onslaught of surveillance technology. The debate whether this may or may not reduce crime or terrorism is no longer relevant. The *de facto* impact on society can already be felt with the content mafia (a.k.a. RIAA, the Recording Industry Association of America)³ demanding access to all data to preserve their dead business model. We will need to build technology to preserve the freedom of speech, the freedom of thought, the freedom of communication. There is no other long-term solution. Political barriers to total surveillance have a very limited half-life period.

The universal acceptance of electronic communication systems has been of tremendous help to political movements. It has become a bit more difficult and costly for those in power to keep their secrets. Unfortunately, the same condition applies to everybody else. So one thing that we can do to help society's progress is to provide tools, knowledge and training for secure communications to every political and social movement that shares at least some of our ideals. We should not be too narrow here in choosing our friends. Everyone who opposes centralistic power structures and totalitarianism should be welcome. Maintaining political breathing spaces becomes as crucial as the utilisation of the space for specific ends.

Digital anonymity will become the most precious experience. Encrypting communications is convenient and necessary, but does not really protect one's privacy or

identity. Traffic analysis is the most valuable intelligence tool around. Only by automatically looking at communications and movement patterns can the interesting individuals be selected, those who justify the cost of detailed surveillance. The widespread implementation of anonymity technologies becomes seriously urgent, given the data retention laws that have been passed in the European Union. We need opportunistic anonymity in exactly the same way as we needed opportunistic encryption. Currently, every anonymisation technology that has been deployed is instantly overwhelmed with file-sharing content. We need solutions for that, preferably with systems that can withstand the load, as anonymity loves company and more traffic means less probability of de-anonymisation by all kinds of attack.

Closed user groups have already gained momentum in communities that have a heightened awareness and demand for privacy. The darker parts of the hacker community and a lot of the warez⁴ trading circles have gone black already. Others will follow. The technology to build real-world, working, closed user groups has yet to be developed. We have only improvised setups that work under very specific circumstances. Generic, easy-to-use technology to create fully encrypted closed user groups for all kinds of content, with a comfortable degree of anonymity, is desperately needed.

Decentralised infrastructure is the need of the hour. The peer-to-peer networks are a good example, if one wants to see what works and what not. As long as there are centralised elements, they can be taken down under one pretext or another. Only true peer-to-peer systems that need as few centralised elements as possible can survive. Interestingly, tactical military networks have the same requirements. We need to borrow from them, just as they borrow from commercial and open source technology.

Designing technology that is able to counter surveillance abuse is the next logical step. A lot of us are involved in designing and implementing systems that can be put to exactly this use. Be it webshop systems, databases, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) systems, communication systems or ordinary Blog servers, the design should be able to protect the system against later abuse of collected data or interception. Often there is considerable freedom to design within the limits of our day jobs. We need to use this freedom to build systems in a way that they collect as little data as possible, use encryption and provide anonymity as much as possible. We need to create a culture around this principle. A system design needs to be viewed by our peers as good only if it adheres to these criteria.

Of course, it may be hard to sacrifice the personal power that comes with access to juicy data. But keep in mind, you will not have this job forever, and whoever takes over the system is most likely not as privacy-minded as you are. Limiting the amount of data gathered on people involved in everyday transactions and communications is an absolute must if you are a serious hacker. There are many positive features of RFID: for instance, making the recycling of goods easier and more effective, by storing information about the material composition and hints about the manufacturing process in tags attached to electronic gadgets. But to be able to harness the good potential of such technologies, the system needs to limit or prevent the downside as much as possible; intentionally, not as an afterthought.

Do not compromise your friends with stupidity, or the impulse of self-protection will become even more essential. We are all used to the minor fuckups of encrypted mail being forwarded unencrypted, of being careless about other people's data traces, or bragging with knowledge obtained in confidence. This is no longer possible. We are facing an enemy that is euphemistically called Global Observer in research papers. This is a literal term. You can no longer rely on information or communication being overlooked or hidden in the noise. Everything is on file. Forever. And it *can* and *will* be used against you. And your innocent slip-up of five years ago might today compromise someone close to you.

Keep silent and enjoy, or publish immediately may become the new mantras for security researchers. Submitting security problems to the manufacturers provides the intelligence agencies with a long period in which they can and will use the problem to attack systems and implant backdoors. It is well known that backdoors are the way around encryption, and that all big manufacturers have an agreement with the respective intelligence agencies of their countries to hand over valuable 0-day⁵ data as soon as this becomes available. This way, the agencies can remain undetected for years without risking exposure. If by chance they are detected, no one will suspect foul play, as the manufacturers will provide the necessary explanatory rationales. So if you discover problems, publish at least enough information to enable people to detect an intrusion before submitting to the manufacturer.

Most important: have fun! The eavesdropping people must be laughed at, as their job is silly, boring, and ethically the worst thing to earn money with. We need to develop a let's-have-fun-confusing-their-systems culture that plays with the inherent imperfections, loopholes, systematic problems and interpretation errors that are inevitable with large scale surveillance. Artists are the right people to implement this kind of approach. We need a subculture of In your face, peeping Tom³ Exposing surveillance logic and methodology in a manner that reveals these to be degrading practices, and giving people something to laugh about with regard to it, must be the goal. Also, this prevents us from becoming frustrated and tired. If we don't enjoy taking on the system, we will get tired of the contest, withdraw from it; and they will win. So instead of being angry, ideological and obdurate, let's be funny, flexible and creative⁴

A version of this text was first published under a Creative Commons licence in the journal *Die Datenschleuder*, # 89 (December 2005). <http://ds.ccc.de>

A forum to debate this text can be found at the author's weblog at http://frank.geekheim.de/?page_id=128

NOTES

1. The Clipper chip, suggested in 1993, was a cryptographic device intended to protect private communications while at the same time permitting US government agents to obtain the keys to this material upon presentation of what was vaguely characterised as legal authorisation. The keys were to be held by the government under terms of escrow, which would enable agents to access encrypted private

communication. The Clipper chip did not receive support from consumers and manufacturers, and the chip itself was a dead issue by 1996. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clipper_chip

For the views of cryptography and computer professionals who opposed the Clipper proposal, see <http://www.cpsr.org/prevsite/program/clipper/clipper.html>

For an official statement by the US government on the Clipper chip, see http://www.epic.org/crypto/clipper/white_house_factsheet.html

2. In a massive international surveillance effort, the US National Security Agency (NSA) has created a global spy system, codename Echelon, to capture and process all satellite, microwave, cellular and fibre-optic communications traffic. Analysts at intercept stations maintain separate keyword lists for the purpose of analysing any conversation or document flagged by the system.

For a detailed history of Echelon, see <http://home.hiwaay.net/~pspoole/echelon.html>

For links, resources and media reports on Echelon, see <http://home.hiwaay.net/~pspoole/echres.html>

3. The RIAA is a critic of music file sharing, and has long contended that sharing of copyrighted music is a form of piracy, applying the well-known computing term to music. The RIAA especially targets music files uploaded onto the Internet using peer-to-peer software. It sees lawsuits as one way to combat the problem of internet-based piracy. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RIAA>
4. The term *warez* refers primarily to copyrighted material traded in violation of copyright law ; illegal releases by organised groups, as opposed to peer-to-peer file sharing between friends or large groups of people with similar interests. It usually does not refer to commercial for-profit software counterfeiting. The production and/or distribution of *warez* is illegal in most countries. However, it is typically overlooked in developing nations with weak or non-existent intellectual property protection.
See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warez>
5. Zero day or 0-day refers to software, videos, music or information released or obtained on the day of public release. Items obtained pre-release are deemed Negative day or sometimes -day. Zero-day software, videos, and music usually have been either illegally obtained or illegally copied. See endnote 3, RIAA; see also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero_day



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Cybermohalla (CM) is a collaboration between Sarai-CSDS and Ankur (Society for Alternatives in Education). CM is a combination of locality labs (LNJP Colony, Dakshinpuri and Nangla Maanchi) and an experimental production lab at Ankur. Approximately 70 practitioners work with various media tools and forms at these labs, including animation, photography, storytelling, performance, radio, stickers, broadsheets, event-based conversations in the locality, wall writing, booklets, wall magazines, blogs, mailing lists, hyperlinked projects, etc. CM practitioners' work has been exhibited in international art, tactical media and performance contexts. CM practitioners are presently also engaged in dialogues with other initiatives to set up locality-based media labs outside Delhi.

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